

AUSTRALIA'S WILDERNESS ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

Wild

MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF WILDERNESS ADVENTURE HERITAGE

ISSUE
151

EARTH OVEN BARRAMUNDI
JOHN BLAY'S BROGO WILDERNESS
EXCLUSIVE: CARING FOR COUNTRY
QUENTIN ON THE ROCKS
KAYAKING THE TARKINE COAST
TRIED AND TESTED: SUNHATS
IN PHOTOS: KAKADU IN THE WET
JATBULA TRAIL TRACK NOTES

The echo of sacred songs

Japan's Nakasendo Way
Wellness and wisdom
Koori medicine plants
Chasing Cyclone Ingrid
Russell Willis profile

ISSN 1030-469X



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Wild

ULTIMATE MODERN ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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Wild would like to
acknowledge and show
respect for the traditional
custodians of Australia and
of their elders, both past
and present.

WARNING

The activities covered
in this magazine are
dangerous. Undertaking
them without proper training,
experience, skill, regard to
safety and equipment could
result in serious injury or death.



Cover Exploring the
Brogo wilderness. John
Blay

Contents Rock art found
in the Amphitheatre,
Nitmiluk NP.
Andrew Davison



"They are a doomed race, and before many years they will be completely wiped out of the land."

- HAROLD FINCH-HATTON (1885)

Native Title

The history of Australia as it is taught in schools is generally considered a highly sanitised version of the events that ultimately culminated in the cultural milieu that forms our nation today. It is also very biased towards the tale of European arrival and subsequent settlement, from the perspective of those same Europeans – a narrative that conveniently glosses over the treatment of Australia's original inhabitants. Many of us graduate into adult life either rejecting the atrocities enacted by white settlers against Aboriginal people or slowly becoming aware of them, but still unsure of how that information should impact our day-to-day existence.

The fact that people had lived in Australia for (probably more than) 40,000 years before the arrival of the First Fleet is a fact that isn't generally considered to have any bearing on the debate at hand. Nor the fact that tens of thousands of Aboriginals were killed in the frontier wars that followed the pastoralist invasion. I know from personal experience that people view this information as either untrue or at least inconvenient; instead the overbearing sentiment is that we brought 'them' technology, civilisation or a better way of living, and if today's Indigenous Australians aren't willing to utilise these systems to their benefit, then why should we care? The quote that I offered at the outset was made a century after the arrival of the First Fleet, not long before Federation by a man strongly in favour of Australia's nationhood. The fact that the sentiment of some people hasn't changed more than a century later offers a deeper insight into the history of this country than is offered in any high school history class. It is my own cynical opinion that this nation was founded on a culture of greed, of prejudice and of violence. The issues that we consider to be so 'un-Australian' – racism, inequality and our poor treatment of refugees – all stem from this foundation.

This issue of Wild marks something of a new beginning for the magazine, as I seek to address some of these concerns. In the news, we find that there may be another referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in our constitution, while in the Wild community, I believe the initiative is already underway. To this end, we present a number of features that explore the country and culture of the first Australians, as well as the first boilerplate acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders on our contents page. This acknowledgement will remain for the foreseeable future.

In acknowledging native title, it has always been the Westerner's error to immediately define land and country in terms of property. While this is a traditional way of thinking for those of European descent, many other cultures find it alien and even illogical. Instead, we must begin to try and think of country in terms of its long term potential as a complex of man-made and natural systems, and even then we must consider what potential exists beyond the physical output.

In our endeavour to work towards a program of respect and recognition for the original inhabitants of Australia, we will also be forging a culture that provides for us all.

Finally, I hope to see more Indigenous contributors and readers sharing their own experiences of country and what it means to them within these pages, and would invite anyone at all to reach out with ideas and opinions through wild@primecreative.com.au.

Campbell Phillips
Editor

Wild

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Publisher John Murphy
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Editor Campbell Phillips

Contributors Don Driscoll, Andrew Davison, Bob Brown, Quentin Chester, Alex Robey, Dave Caldwell, Bruce and Alistair Paton, Karen Lavelle, John Blay, Tim O'Reilly, Michele Kohout, Joe Bonington, Stuart Matheson, Olivia Grover Johnson and Lexie Webster.

Advertising & Sales Campbell Phillips
campbell.phillips@primecreative.com.au

Group sales manager Brad Buchanan

Design Blake Storey, Sarah Doyle

Art director & Production Michelle Weston

Subscriptions Gordon Watson

subscriptions@primecreative.com.au

Administration assistant Justine Nardone

Accounts Brooke Radley

accounts@primecreative.com.au

Founder Chris Baxter OAM

Printing Manark Printing

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All correspondence to:

Prime Creative Media

11-15 Buskhurst St

South Melbourne

VIC 3205

Australia

Ph 03 9690 8766

Fax 03 9682 0044

Email wild@primecreative.com.au

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Issue 150, Nov-Dec 2015



LETTER OF THE ISSUE

Jeremy wins a Therm-a-Rest TREO valued at \$179.95. This camp chair has a realistic seat height and width so that it's no hassle to get in or out of, while still packing away into its own tripod base.



WILD IN REVIEW

The arrival of *Wild* 150 led me to carefully extract from my bookshelf the 'First New Issue' of *Australian Wild*, which I enthusiastically purchased in 1981 for the grand sum of \$1.95. It remains in excellent condition and even contains the small subscription insert that I never got around to completing. I also uncovered the second issue, after which there is a gap in my collection, coinciding with my absence overseas.

Reading 'The Mountain Designs Story' (Issue 1) again, brought back some great memories of that era, including our Balls Pyramid expedition in 1980. A few of us bought our first (decent) sleeping bags from Rick White and I still have the backpack I purchased from his early series of 'rucksacks' - it's had a pretty adventurous life but still made it to the top of Mount Victoria in Papua New Guinea in 2009 (the red and blue pack with the large pot hanging off it in the attached photo), so, like *Wild*, it has been pretty good value! *Wild* stands as a tribute to the vision of the magazine's founder and the dedication of all who have contributed articles over the past 34 years. This publication is as relevant

now as it was then and although I have been an erratic subscriber, I have valued every edition for its varied content and magnificent photographs. There can be no doubt about the contribution that *Wild* has made to people's appreciation of the natural environment and the importance of conserving our wild places at the same time as enjoying them. Congratulations on 150 editions of a superb magazine and I look forward to reading the 300th issue when I'm 80.

Jeremy Scriven
via email, QLD

WHAT THE DEVIL?

I was fascinated to read your news piece about the possible reintroduction of the Tasmanian devil into southeastern NSW ('Research supports for mainland devils pilot', *Wild* 149) to help reduce the spread of foxes and cats. Having lived and worked on farms my whole life, I've seen the devastating impacts feral predators can have on livestock, and I support any trials that may assist in suppressing them. If implemented, my only question would be how the devils will be controlled as to not harm NSW's own healthy species of birds, snakes and insects? I can't help but wonder how useful a reintroduction program will be if the reintroduced species has been removed from the habitat in question for centuries, if not millennia. I guess time will tell and I look forward to hearing of the outcome in your magazine. Keep up the great work. I enjoy reading the magazine, especially the information about wildlife conservation.

Kim Jones
Cooma, NSW

ARCHITECTURE OF LANGUAGE

Your piece on the effect of linguistic 'negligence' on humanity's interaction with nature ('Synthetic vocabulary reflects the rise of technology', *Wild* 148) did make me wonder whether the debate around the slow decay of our language is, in fact, just part of culture itself, and therefore less of a threat to the conservation debate and more of an ordinary evolutionary process. A while ago, *The Independent's* Jean Aitchison highlighted that laments about language go back for centuries, stating, "the web of worries surrounding change turns out to be largely traditional, somewhat like the worries each new generation of parents has about its offspring."

Her research led her to a 14th-Century monk who allegedly complained that the English practised strange "waffying, chattering, harrying, and garrying grisbittying" - in today's language he was referring to strange stammering, chattering, snarling and grating tooth-gnashing. Yet, "Tongues, like governments, have a natural tendency to degeneration," as the lexicographer Samuel Johnson wrote in the preface to his famous *Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755.

So, are we complaining about a natural phenomenon taking away our ability to describe, name and appreciate nature itself? And if so, how far can we go with such a complaint?

In 1985, bad English, whatever that might be, was even linked to crime by Lord Tebbit, then a key British government figure. He said, "If you allow standards to slip to the stage where good English is no better than bad English, where people turn up filthy ... at school ... all those things tend to cause people to have no standards at all, and once you lose standards then there's no imperative to stay out of crime."

Responding to Tebbit, Aitchison made a good point in her piece when she referred to what she labeled the "crumbling castle" view. Can, or should you, treat the English language as a beautiful old building with gargoyles and pinnacles that need to be preserved intact? Is it naïve to think the 'castle of English' was gradually and lovingly assembled until it reached a point of maximum splendour at some unspecified time in the past?

I am with Ms Aitchison when she disapproves of the 'beautiful building' notion's presupposition that rigid systems, once assembled, are better than changing ones. This is untrue. In the animal world, flexibility is a great advantage, and animals that adhere to fixed systems often lose out.

Tobias Karl
Wagga, NSW

WORD FROM THE WISE

I'm a 68-year-old hiking enthusiast who has been trekking about this country for a good thirty years. In that time I have made my way across most states from the classic Larapinta trek in the Northern Territory to the leisurely Overland Trek down in Tasmania. As a younger woman I would pack the car, the husband and the children at every chance I would get to see a bit more of this big wide and wonderful country on foot. The moments we shared walking side by side were some of the dearest memories I've made over the years.

THE WINNER: BUSHWALKING TIP



Plastic chopping boards can come in handy when it comes to difficult gear repairs. We were skiing in the high country when we met some guys fixing a gouge in one of their skis by melting some of this plastic into it. It's fair to say that the process is not recommended unless necessary: melting the plastic creates noxious fumes that can't be good for your health or that of the environment – but it worked! One of the gentlemen went on to explain how a friend had used up an entire board in patching a hole in his kayak.

Eleanor Palmer
Abbotsford, VIC

Eleanor wins a Therm-a-Rest SLACKER, valued at \$125. This recently released hammock delivers in comfort with its seamless construction and supple fabric, perfect for winding down on after a long day.



As the kids got older, it sometimes felt like the only time they'd really open up and talk to my husband and I were during those long hours creating footprints in the dirt, sand and mud.

This love of good outdoor walking is something I am proud to have passed on to them, and something I am joyous to still be regularly enjoying today. Which is why it upsets me to read reflections from other readers that there aren't more young people out and about enjoying the outdoors. For those of you who have ever been to The Grampians or Mount Arapiles in Victoria over the Easter, Christmas – or any long weekend for that matter – you will see that the love of the outdoors lives strong in our offspring. How could it not? We paved this path for them.

While I admit that it is more common for me to pass, or probably be passed by, groups or couples of similar age to me, this doesn't mean the young kids aren't out and about. We might have more time on our hands in our older years to pursue our outdoor dreams, but that doesn't mean the younger generation aren't following in our footsteps.

So next time you older folk start putting pen to paper to lament the youth of today sitting inside watching Netflix (I'm told they do a bit of that too?) take a moment to pause and look up, see that kid on the cliff? He'll be overtaking you on the path in a year or two.

Ruth Connelly
Wollongong, NSW

CURB YOUR POPULATION

I saw your article with Dick Smith in issue 150 ("Dick Smith: "We need the wild"), and I couldn't help but question some of the logic behind reducing our immigration intake. Surely, I agree that we focus all too much attention on boosting our economy with the growth of workers to supply a tax base, but preventing some people from coming to Australia will surely only exacerbate the problem, rather than alleviate it. Let's remember, the issues we face as a result of overpopulation aren't as a result of Australia's population, it's a global phenomenon. As David Attenborough recently went on the record as saying, it's the education of women and their right to choose to have children that has the biggest impact of any when it comes to slowing the birth rate. This is the very reason why we've needed to prop up our population in recent years - our education and health systems are actively slowing the birth rate! Why shouldn't we take in as many people as we can in a bid to provide them with a better life, and to provide our own children with a future?

Anonymous
Perth, WA

150 AND GOING STRONG

I woke up this morning to find a brand-new copy of Wild on my doorstep. It's the 150th in my collection and I hope to see many more!

John Canning
Footscray, VIC

Readers' letters & tips are welcome and could win you a useful piece of outdoor kit. Write to Wild, 11-15 Buckhurst St, South Melbourne, VIC 3206 or email wild@primecreative.com.au



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Follow the LEADER

James Stuart from Canterbury NSW writes: *Getting my young daughter outdoors has been one of the great pleasures of parenthood. This holiday we took on a short walk to the Aboriginal rock paintings at Jibbon headland in Royal National Park. Captured with an Olympus OM-D EM-1.*

Photographer's checklist: Shooting in sacred places

Every country has sensitive buildings or locations where it's very easy for visiting photographers to make a cultural faux pas. The following are some basic tips to ensure you remain considerate:

- When shooting in a sacred or sensitive location you must first recognise the importance of some places and objects and the value they hold for other people, thereby respecting the region for what it is. It's easy to get excited when visiting such sites and forget why they're there in the first place. My advice is to try and take it all in before you even get your camera gear out. This will slow you down and make you more aware of how to behave appropriately.
- In Australia, visiting sacred sites will require either permission from traditional landowners or from governing bodies. Be sure to check what permission is needed well before you visit to the location. Many places will require weeks of planning to visit and to photograph. Do your research and get permission in advance to avoid disappointment and possible legal action after the event.
- When shooting in such places, remember to avoid causing any damage or even leaving any footprints. These locations are unique and have often been that way for centuries – if not millennia – before you've arrived, so it's your duty to help ensure they remain so after you've left. Stick to marked paths, follow directions and respect any information that is given to you.
- An absolutely critical rule is to ensure no artefacts are defaced or removed as a result of your visit. For example, along the Tarkine coast region of Tasmania's northwest there are many ancient campsites, middens and tools that were left by the island's original inhabitants. The fact that careless visitors have damaged some of these sites is a

disgrace and it would be shameful for the situation to be made any worse. Don't touch, don't take. Simple.

- How best to photograph these special locations is really up to your creative mind. Again, it is a good idea to do some research on images of these locations before you get there. There is nothing worse than arriving to a location at the right time of day or night only to fumbling around trying to get the best angles or viewpoints. Know your subject and come prepared. This will give you the best chance of capturing a great photograph.



Award-winning landscape photographer Cameron Blake runs weekend workshops and six-day tours on the Overland Track. His next tour departs on the 7th of January, 2016.

overlandphototours.com.au



James wins an Osprey Aether 60L hiking pack, courtesy of Paddy Pallin. Valued at \$324.95.

For your chance to win a quality piece of outdoor kit, send your

humorous, inspiring or spectacular shots to wild@primecreative.com.au.

To be considered for the March/ April Wild Shot, submit your best photo by January 29.



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Image © Loganban | Dreamstime.com

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Carbon emissions fall in 2015

The announcement of this year's Global Carbon Budget has brought some positivity to the ongoing debate around climate change; with experts indicating that carbon emissions are projected to fall in 2015.

The report from the Global Carbon Project found that fossil fuel emissions of carbon dioxide grew by just 0.6 per cent in 2014, which is much lower than the previous annual growth of between two and three per cent that has been the norm since near the turn of the millennium.

As Pep Canadell, CSIRO scientist and executive director of the Global Carbon Project said, this

is the first two-year period in a multi-decade record where the global economy shows clear signs of decoupling from fossil fuel emissions. In a separate study, published in *Nature Climate Change*, researchers analysed the likely drop in global carbon dioxide that, if true, will be the first time such a drop has happened without being prompted by a significant economic slump.

However, Canadell and others have stated that it is "quite unlikely that 2015 is the much-sought-after global peak in emissions" that will then drop off as we wean ourselves off fossil fuels.

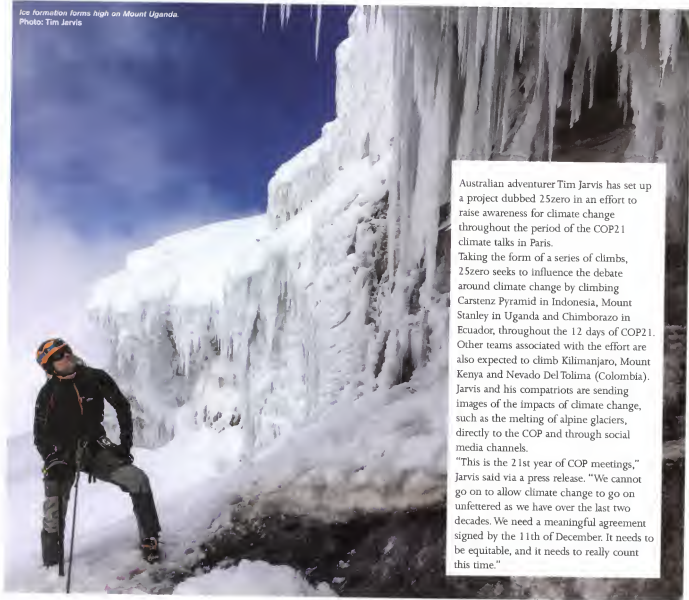
To assume this means that the apparent drop in carbon emissions isn't linked to global finances would be a mistake, as experts are pointing towards China's economic slowdown as the major driver behind the decrease.

China remains responsible for 27 per cent of global emissions and has led the charge in emissions growth over the past 15 or so years, but it has pledged to curtail its emissions by 2030.

At the time of writing (early December 2015), the COP21 climate meeting continues in Paris, and it's unclear how this news may impact the highly politicised talks.

25zero documents glacial retreat during COP21

Ice formation forms high on Mount Uganda.
Photo: Tim Jarvis



Australian adventurer Tim Jarvis has set up a project dubbed 25zero in an effort to raise awareness for climate change throughout the period of the COP21 climate talks in Paris.

Taking the form of a series of climbs, 25zero seeks to influence the debate around climate change by climbing Carstenz Pyramid in Indonesia, Mount Stanley in Uganda and Chimborazo in Ecuador, throughout the 12 days of COP21. Other teams associated with the effort are also expected to climb Kilimanjaro, Mount Kenya and Nevado Del Tolima (Colombia). Jarvis and his compatriots are sending images of the impacts of climate change, such as the melting of alpine glaciers, directly to the COP and through social media channels.

"This is the 21st year of COP meetings," Jarvis said via a press release. "We cannot go on to allow climate change to go on unfettered as we have over the last two decades. We need a meaningful agreement signed by the 11th of December. It needs to be equitable, and it needs to really count this time."

Referendum Council formed to advise on Indigenous recognition

Prominent Indigenous leaders, lawyers, health advocates and more have been named as members of a Referendum Council, which has been appointed to advise party leaders Malcolm Turnbull and Bill Shorten on how to secure sufficient support for Indigenous recognition in a national vote. The date of such a vote has not been announced, but may be expected as soon as 2017.

The confirmation of the council's membership follows calls from the Recognise campaign to move the process along as a result of a surge in public support.

Awareness of Aboriginal constitutional recognition had risen from 37 per cent in March this year to 63 per cent in October, according to a poll by Pollity Research.

"This surge of awareness and support can't be taken for granted," announced joint campaign director of Recognise, Tanya Hosch in November. "The prime minister and the opposition leader must urgently reach agreement on the composition of the referendum council so the next big step towards a model and a referendum can be taken."

Now, members to that council have been announced, including Indigenous leader Patrick Dodson, lawyer Mark Leibler, former AFL chief Andrew Demetriou and Hosch, among others.

However, it appears that not even the council's members can agree on the correct course of action, with Professor Megan Davis of the Indigenous Law Centre at the University of New South Wales telling ABC's AM program that a referendum would not be supported by Indigenous communities if reforms did not entail meaningful change.

"If the reforms aren't going to make a significant difference to their lives, if it's not going to advance the legal status or position that they have currently, then it's a huge amount of political capital and money to expend on something that's not going to take us forward," she said.

SCROGGIN

Secrets of 'resurrection' grass revealed

A native grass, *Tripsacum daniellii* is known as a 'resurrection plant' due to its ability to apparently dry out and die during long droughts, only to be revived with the reappearance of water. Previous studies have shown that even after losing more than 95 per cent of its water content, this Queensland grass species maintains its ability to revive when water is returned. Published in PLOS Genetics, researchers from Queensland's University of Technology (QUT) have for the first time shown how the plants manage this process through the accumulation of specific sugars and the controlled killing off of specific cells. It is hoped the research could eventually help world food crops to become more drought resistant as climate changes continues.

The history of Australia's feral cat

Cats in Australia are most likely descended from those brought over by European colonialists, according to new research published in BMC Evolutionary Biology. The study contradicts theories such as feral cats are descended from those used as pest control on the ships of explorers in the 18th Century, or that they were the pets of Malaysian fishermen that may have visited Northern Australia in the mid 17th Century. German scientists from Senckenberg Biodiversity and Climate Research Centre and the University of Koblenz-Landau analysed mitochondrial DNA from 266 Australian feral cats taken from six mainland and seven island locations.

I choose Hilleberg tents.

Will Copestake

Circumnavigated Scotland solo by kayak and climbed all 282 Munros – peaks over 915 m – in 364 days. Adventurer of the Year 2015 for Scotland and the for the UK. Makes any adventure look like the most fun anyone could ever have. Uses the Hilleberg Allak.



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The hunt that's killing Borneo

by Professor Don Driscoll

Intermittent explosions punctuated my family's visit to Mulu World Heritage Area in Sarawak, Malaysian Borneo. Although the rangers suggested these shotgun-like bangs were actually fire-works, their explanations lacked conviction. The empty shotgun cartridge I found in a remote part of the park suggested an alternative explanation for both the disconcerting explosions and the general paucity of large mammals.

There are no Orangutan in Mulu, and like almost all of Borneo, rhinoceros have been hunted to extinction. The only non-human primates we encountered in Mulu were two red leaf monkeys, which instantly fled upon seeing us, and two groups of gibbons, heard in the distance during our trek to the Mulu summit.

Our guide explained that poachers and local tribes continued to hunt in areas zoned exclusively for conservation. Hunting in Mulu World Heritage Area, and in most protected areas in Malaysian Borneo is a complex social problem, born of rainforest destruction, corruption and modernisation. In the Mulu area, rainforest logging in the 1970s and 80s destroyed the traditional lives of the Penan and other indigenous tribes. Displaced indigenous people retain hunting rights over many parts of the protected area system. They are armed with new weapons, their sedentary populations are growing, and they have deep cultural links to hunting wild animals. Visiting a Penan longhouse near Mulu, our local guide explained that people earned some money

through tourism, but generally, their income was too low to buy the basics. In these impoverished conditions, hunting is an essential supplement to their subsistence.

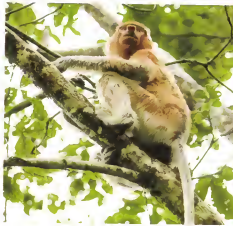
Motivation to solve the over hunting problem is weak, even among many rangers. That is understandable among the Penan rangers (who used to regard killing a rhinoceros as a rite of passage to manhood), though is still problematic. Corruption, however, remains a key driver of wildlife destruction in Malaysian Borneo. We discovered this first hand when we visited the iconic Kinabalu National Park in Sabah. Staying with a local tourist operator outside the park, I was surprised to find that I wasn't allowed to use trails into the park. When I asked the operator about this, he explained how their staff had caught Park Rangers poaching wildlife, red handed. When challenged, park staff ruled that the tour guide could no longer enter the park. This story made sense of my observations. I had expected this long-standing, large national park to be home to a broad range of primates and other native mammals. Instead, we didn't see a single mammal or large bird during our two-night visit.

In stark contrast to the jungles bereft of large animals at Mulu and Kinabalu, Danum Valley in southern Sabah was dripping with wildlife. Families of red leaf monkeys sat in trees above the river, and troops of macaques, flocks of pheasants and deer strutted through the small settlement. Gibbons hooted in the fruiting fig tree outside our accommodation, and there were orangutan and elephants in the jungle nearby. The difference between most of Malaysian Borneo and Danum Valley was a combination of boom gates, armed rangers and tradition. When the local Orange Sungai tribe travelled up-river to the forests, they came for ceremonies and burials, not for hunting.

With multiple drivers of hunting in Borneo, diverse solutions are needed. Corruption-free enforcement has an essential role, particularly for protecting high-value fauna. Managing human-population size in areas around national parks may also help, but diminishing the economic necessity to hunt is critical. If those problems can be solved, then programs to encourage changes in attitudes towards wildlife, from food to friend, might have a chance.



Red leaf monkeys sit in the forest in Danum Valley, Sabah. Professor Don Driscoll



Bushwalking Victoria advocates a light touch



A new brochure produced by Bushwalking Victoria is designed to encourage a conservationist approach to bushwalking in Australia's wilderness places.

The document, entitled *Tread Softly*, was launched on the 3rd of December and lists 10 recommended practices that help minimise bushwalker impact without taking away from their enjoyment of the activity.

Each practice is explained as a straightforward action that bushwalkers should find are relatively common sense – many are likely to already undertake most, if not all, of these activities anyway.

For this reason, Bushwalking Victoria says the

document isn't just aimed at people who identify as bushwalkers, but to all people who walk in protected areas.

"Bushwalking is the primary active recreation of 200,000 Victorians," said Bushwalking Victoria board member, Joslin Guest. "53,000 Victorians four-wheel drive in the bush for recreation. 24,000 Victorians hunt and shoot. Hundreds of thousands of Victorians, interstate and overseas tourists visit Victoria's internationally acclaimed national parks. "All of these people, even if they wouldn't dream of calling themselves bushwalkers, walk in the bush," she said.

The new code was launched alongside the

Geelong Bushwalking Club's new edition of *Walking the Onways* at an event in Johnstone Park, Geelong, which was attended by members of Geelong Bushwalking Club and Bushwalking Victoria, local councillors and Parks Victoria staff, with appearances from both John and Monica Chapman.

"Every year, more people visit Victoria's parks, forests and reserves," Guest said. "Bushwalking Victoria wants more people to walk in the bush, but it wants them to tread softly to preserve the natural environment, which is what attracts them there in the first place."

10 Tread Softly Actions:

- Small group sizes
- Stay on established tracks
- Use existing campsites
- Use a stove for cooking
- Take care with campfires
- Protect water sources
- Bury toilet waste
- Carry out all rubbish
- Respect flora and fauna
- Comply with biosecurity measures

The full brochure with additional details on each action can be found via the Bushwalking Victoria website.



www.bushwalkingvictoria.org.au

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Caring for country

by Andrew Davison

I had been following Berribob's long, light gait through the bush of the central Arnhem Land plateau all morning, taking note of the wealth of knowledge he holds. Neatly dressed in a red flannelette shirt and shorts with a large knife tucked into the elastic, Berribob had been sharing his intimate knowledge of the central Arnhem Plateau with me enthusiastically, but he was slow and meticulous in showing me all the details of the land he knows so well.

"I didn't go to school," he explains to me, "I lived with my father in the bush, he taught me everything. If I get lost in the bush I will live, I know what to eat, I know how to make tools." But I was very much doubtful Berribob could become lost in this country; he knew it without question. If he spoke of the west he would point without thought or deliberation exactly to the west, then after walking in what seemed like circles and then mentioning the east, again without hesitation his finger pointed in the exact direction of east while I stood there calculating, noting the sun and double-checking with my compass. It was innate for Berribob, like he had an inbuilt GPS. There was no questioning his connection and knowledge of the land, it was almost like he was part of it. He moved through it with effortless prowess, his eyes falling on features that I would not have noticed if not pointed out.

The Arnhem Plateau is an impressive landscape, unapologetically brutal yet mystical and luring. Rising from its surrounding, it is a great mass of sand stone and spinifex, its ochre stained escarpments rise dramatically from the lowland plains and verdant wetlands. From the air the plateau is a view of inhospitable country, a great wilderness of stark ridges, deep ravines, spires

of stone, and labyrinthine gorges full of dense vegetation.

To Ludwig Leichhardt, who along with his party, was among the first Europeans to enter the interior of the plateau, the landscape was demoralising. "I had a most disheartening, sickening view over a tremendously rocky country...and a green vegetation crowding deceitfully within their fissures and gullies, and covering half of the difficulties which awaited us on our attempt to travel over it," he wrote in his diary.

But these views of a harsh, inhospitable environment, I was discovering, are that of the uninitiated foreigner, one without the knowledge, without a connection to the land. For the short time I spent with Berribob, I was beginning to see the land of the Arnhem plateau differently, something that was not just beautiful scenery, wild and inhospitable, but I was beginning to notice the distinctive bond that existed between man, his environment and spiritual wellbeing. The relationship has its roots in a philosophy that espouses that humans, nature and land are as one; the land is their source of identity and spirituality.

Berribob displayed a great sense of pride when talking of his land, of his heritage and knowledge and rightfully so; there are very few people that can still safely hunt and kill an adult water buffalo armed with only a few spears and a lifetime of knowledge. However, it is his knowledge of bush tucker and medicine that is recognised and regarded amongst his peers. Berribob is one of a number of Warddeken Rangers employed to care for a vast section of the Arnhem plateau protected under the IPA (Indigenous Protected Area). The rangers work

in a vast array of capacities, and it appears Berribob's primary role is teaching the young the skills that are quickly becoming lost. Showing them how a water hole with an abundance of fish would be a meal for many if they knew the correct tree to use to poison the water so they rise to the surface; teaching the variety of seeds and fruits that are in abundance in any particular season and the knowledge required to make a strong spear and other tools required for a comfortable existence in the bush. Berribob is often perplexed how the youth don't know some of the fundamentals and thinks everyone should have this knowledge if they are to care for country: "All the stuff is still there, spread out around us, but it is only for the people that know, the people that carry the relationship with the land, the knowledge of how to care for it and respect it, do the right thing to it, then you can live out here without going hungry, without problem."

.....
In the hottest part of the day Berribob and I retreat to the small community. I sit and drink a cup of tea and yarn with Nigel. Nigel has been a ranger for Warddeken Land Management for over four years. Nigel has over 40 years experience in land management and has successfully liaised between cultures in land management. The main focus currently, he explains to me, is that of fire management and feral animal and weed control: "We need to burn, but it needs to happen the right way; the way our ancestors showed us." Nigel is well qualified to manage land with the use of fire, he knows the time of year and time of the day when the fires will creep along and then safely burn out. He has travelled to South

Africa to share his fire management knowledge with village chiefs in Namibia and spoken at conferences across Australia about Indigenous land management. In his younger years he worked as a research assistant with CSIRO looking at impacts of feral rats and buffalo damage to freshwater systems.

I asked him where he went to school and if he studied environmental science. He nods and without thought he responds: "When I was a young boy I walked from Barunga [a small community on the southwestern edge of the Arnhem Plateau] to Coronation Hill [Kakadu National park]." This is a trip of no less than 200 kilometres through trackless country and, as Nigel explained, with only the basic things: "no boots, just shorts." He then continues to explain, "My dad showed me everything: what animals eat at different times of the year, where to find them, how and when to burn, he showed me how to do it properly."

"We do it different than the scientists, we know when to burn, it's when the flowers come to a type of tree, not by the date of the calendar, it doesn't always work like that. Look now, we should be in what Balanda [non-Indigenous Australians] call 'build up' [the time of hot humid air, thunder and lightning, but little or no rain to offer relief] but it has not come yet, it has come on the calendar though".

Although fire containment and controlled burning create a great part of what the Wardkeen rangers do in the name of 'land management', in the past these practices were less about land management and more about survival. The Bininj used fire as a tool in what has often been dubbed 'fire stick farming'. Bininjs intimate understanding of the land meant burning in the Yegge season when soaks, water holes and bogs still hold water, the fire only burnt the dry, fire-tolerant areas allowing for a mosaic of burnt and unburnt areas. This, in turn, leaves pockets of refuge for wildlife, and in some areas this practice also allowed an increase in the yield of wild plant food. It also cleans up the land for easier movement and tracking of animals, encourages regrowth that attracts potential food source in the form of

kangaroos or wallabies for easy hunting and, as Nigel explains, fire was "also used as a trap, forcing mobs of kangaroos fleeing fire into the range of spears." Fire was a tool used to secure long-term food supply.

In the cool of the afternoon, among the nooks and shelters of low sandstone outcrops with Berriboh, he wanted to show me where his ancestors would gather and shelter from the elements. Fragments of tools were scattered on the floor of the shelters and bowl like indentations were conveniently carved on the large rocks embedded in the ground. Like the base of a mortar and pestle, these were used primarily for grinding seeds and fruit. Depicted on the walls was ancient art, from hand stencils to bush tucker found throughout the region. There were images of fish and turtle, kangaroo and goanna and on prominent walls uncluttered with other art were a number of ochre images of spirits. All the images held a story, but none are as important as the teaching the paintings of spirits bring with them. It is the story of a time that is often referred to as the 'Dreaming', a time of the creation of the land, when the spirits formed the land, planted food, created people, told them the language to speak and left animals to hunt. It is a religious foundation with an intimate link to the land, all the natural features on it and all living within it, including people, are owned by their 'Dreaming', where everything is as one. It is their duty to carry out the correct procedure in respect to the land and the dreaming, carry out the correct rituals and protect sacred natural features. It is a responsibility to care for country, as in turn this is caring for one's self and one's spirituality. But the stories are not only limited to the painting on the rocks. I am learning there are stories everywhere, written in the landscape by the creating ancestors, stories of a connection to their land, to their cultural practices, their systems of authority and social control. These relationships are critical for the health of any society and the environment in which they exist. The loss of these practices – in Western society and in theirs – does not bode well for



the future of humanity.

Back at the camp Nigel notes the compass that is sticking from my pocket. I test the accuracy of his direction and am astonished, he laughs at my expression and says, "I'm not very good with using those white man's tools, I just know my direction; my dad taught me, all I gotta do is remember how my grandfather and father did it." I smile, hold up the compass and say, "this is how my father and grandfather did it!" He smiles and then gives me a look of serious sentiment and replies: "You have to walk around without takin' that compass Andrew, you have to know country, you have to care for country and country will care for you." I nodded, I was beginning to understand, I could only agree.



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Koori medicinal plants

It's easy to forget that Australia's Indigenous cultures derived much more value from the flora and fauna around them than is encompassed by the term 'bush tucker'. In particular native plants were not only harvested for food and tools, certain species also held medicinal and spiritual value as well. Various parts of any given plant may be utilised in a number of ways, and depending on the species these uses may only be available at certain times of the year as a result of seasonality. Furthermore, the processes and techniques required to render a plant useful – in whole or in part – may often be labour-intensive and detail-oriented in order to avoid a potentially fatal incident.

The following is a list of some of the plant species or plant families and their known uses as medicines for the Koori people of Victoria. It is by no means exhaustive and Wild makes no claim as to the actual efficacy of these plants as medicine. We advise that these remedies should not be used by anyone who hasn't been trained in traditional preparation techniques.

Austral mulberry (*Hedyosmum angustifolia*) – The fruit of this plant are not edible, but are used as a topical ointment for cuts and stings. The stems of the plant also make good fire drills and spear prongs due to their straight, hard nature.

Bracken (*Pteridium esculentum*) – Green shoots are commonly rubbed on insect bites, while the root, or rhizome, is a source of edible starch once cooked and separated from fibrous parts.

Cherry ballart (*Eucarpus cupressiformis*) – Found in sclerophyll forest, the foliage of this plant is toxic to stock but its fruit has a sweet, edible red stem. The sap is applied topically to treat snakebite.

Darling lily (*Crinum floccidum*) – A large lily with cream-coloured flowers, it grows in the floodplains of the Murray-Darling basin. The bulb of this lily, while regarded as poisonous, is applied as a topical skin treatment.

Drooping sheoak (*Allocasuarina verticillata*) – Mature cones from this tree are ground up and applied to sores to treat rheumatism. Extracts from the bark and wood are also used as a general medicine.

Emu bush (*Eremophila* sp.) – Comprising some 200-plus species, this genus of evergreen plant is common throughout Australia's arid regions commonly named for being a food plant for emus and other birds. Smoke produced when burning these plants is used for both ceremonial and medicinal purposes. It is used to treat colds and sores.

Hemp bush (*Gynotrix pulchella*) – The bark of this shrub can be used to make a basic string, while the leaves are used as a poultice for boils and ulcers.

Hop bush (*Dodonaea viscosa*) – The roots of this plant produce a juice that is applied topically for cuts and stings as well as toothache.

Manna gum (*Eucalyptus viminalis*) – Known for its sugary sap, the bark of this tree is used to make simple shields and containers. Its leaves are also burnt to create a medicinal smoke for curing a fever.

Native willow (*Pittosporum angustifolium*) – Seeds and leaves are used as medicine for colds and eczema.

Old man saltbush (*Atriplex nummularia*) – The salty leaves are commonly cooked and eaten, but can also be applied topically as a medicine for cuts and stings.

Old man weed (*Centipeda cunninghamii*) – Commonly found along the Murray, as well as other low-lying, swampy habitats, this plant is considered efficacious for many complaints including eye infections,



Sweet quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) is commonly thought of as bush tucker, but to some Indigenous people its seed contains valuable medicine.

tuberculosis and skin complaints and is administered as an extract in water or sometimes rubbed onto the skin.

Puntty bush (*Senna artemisioides*) – A dry-country species with many subspecies, the seeds of the puntty bush are edible, while the leaves used for a medicinal wash.

River mint (*Martha australis*) – A native mint used as a medicine for coughs and colds, ingested in the form of a tea, it also makes for a flavouring herb for the lining of earth ovens.

Spiny flat-sedge (*Cyperus gymnocaulis*) – The stems of this plant are prized for weaving but could also be soaked in water to produce a tea to treat sore throat.

Stinkwood (*Zizier arborescens*) – An appropriately named gully shrub that the Tasmanians utilised to relieve pain and headaches by binding the strong-smelling leaves around their heads.

Sweet quandong (*Santalum acuminatum*) – Known for its red fruit that can be eaten raw, people Indigenous to central Australia are known to have ground up the oily seed found within the fruit's stone and used it as a topical cream for the scalp.

Wattle (*Acacia* sp.) – The bark of wattles are ingested as a tea and used as a mild sedative for rheumatism or indigestion, but can also be used as a fish poison, most likely due to plant's tannins. The gum of some species (golden, silver and black wattles) is edible, while other species have edible seeds.



www.monash.edu.au/campuses/clayton/gardens/Aboriginal-gardens.html



Acknowledgements

This article has been compiled with the assistance of Dr Beth Gott, caretaker of the Aboriginal Garden at Monash University, Clayton. For a full list of plants, their Aboriginal names and utility, be sure to download the information sheet from the Monash University website.

Curious about a plant or animal you've spotted?

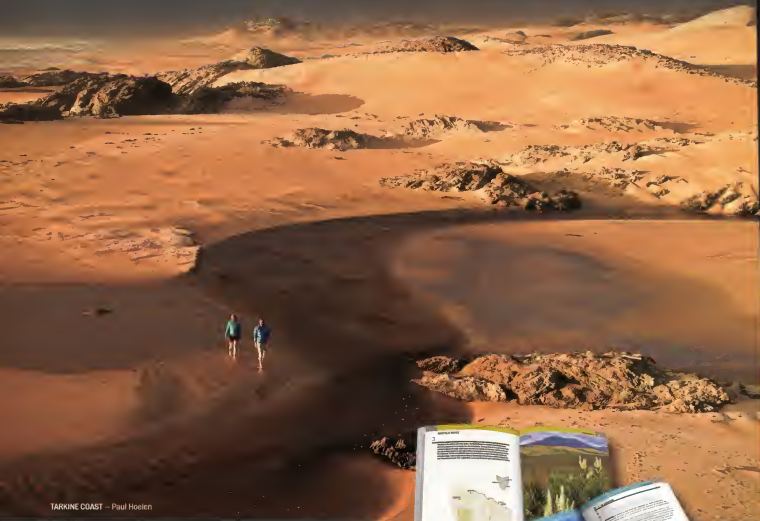
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Bob Brown's green living

Bob Brown discovers an ecological haven in the form of remote Pitcairn Island

When Acting Lieutenant Fletcher Christian led the mutiny on *The Bounty* in 1787, he opted to set Captain William Bligh and 18 others adrift in a lifeboat rather than shoot them. Bligh managed a stunning 6,000 kilometres trip west to Timor. He was subsequently made Governor of New South Wales, but in Sydney Town his abrasive style led to another mutiny: the Rum Rebellion of 1794.

After 16 crewmembers decamped in Tahiti, Christian and his Tahitian girlfriend Mauatua, with eight other mutineers and 18 more Tahitians, sailed east and secreted themselves on the remote but forested volcanic outcrop of Pitcairn Island. The mutineers, to help avoid discovery and inevitable hanging, burned *The Bounty*. After 19 years the Pitcairn colony was found by a passing American ship, but by then all the mutineers except one, John Adams, had been murdered in internecine wrangles. A century later and the population grew to more than 200.

A further century on and Pitcairn, which is 7,500 kilometres east-northeast of Sydney, has become a global exemplar. This year the

UK government declared the Pitcairn Islands Marine Reserve. It is the world's largest fully protected marine area. It incorporates the waters of Pitcairn Island plus the uninhabited islands of Henderson (a raised limestone plateau which has three unique birds) and the atolls of Oeno and Ducie (a World Heritage seabird sanctuary nearest Easter Island). This massive reserve totals 834,000 square kilometres and may well guarantee Pitcairn's future.

From two weeks in the region last month, courtesy of Lindblad Expeditions and National Geographic, Pitcairn's potential seems plain sailing considering its turbulent past. In this age of collapsing fisheries, bleaching corals and acidifying oceans, having such a vast marine reserve is sure to attract more and more nature lovers from around the world.

On rugged Pitcairn Island itself (four kilometres long, no airport possible, a 300 metres haul up over the ridge to cross the island) the people are friendly, we met no biting insects and the views are superb. We walked to the eastern extremity for a dip in

St Paul's Pool where volcanic rock pillars allow the surging seas just enough entry to replenish the raised rockpool.

Unlike on Henderson Island, efforts to get the rats off Pitcairn have so far failed. We saw two feral cats and there are nearly 200 introduced species of plants threatening to overcome the endemic flora. However the wild goats are gone and there is a vibrant ecosensitivity in the air. The school has an 'eco-walk' through a remnant patch of rainforest and the famous Pitcairn reed warbler flits from tree to tree.

The first Polynesian settlers came and went centuries before Fletcher Christian and his companions arrived: they left rock carvings on the beachside cliffs. But it is a fair bet that in this age of rapid despoliation of the oceans the attractiveness of Pitcairn's pristine seas will see its settlement secured and burgeoning in the years ahead.

Meanwhile, with an exodus of youngsters, Pitcairn's meagre modern population of 45 is ageing and the islanders are carefully seeking young folk to settle and help reverse that trend. If only I were 18 again!



St Paul's Pool at the eastern tip of Pitcairn Island. Photo: Bob Brown



Coast Redux

Attempting to reach a particularly rugged corner of Kangaroo Island, *Quentin Chester* finds himself in a precarious position



The rocks are slippery and treacherous at the base of the cliffs of Moncrieff Bay, Kangaroo Island. Photo: Quentin Chester

I've done it again. Another wrong turn, another day-dreamy mistake has me atop of a granite bluff with no way down to the shore. It's my third attempt in as many weeks to reach this cryptic corner of Kangaroo Island. The access is wooded and tricky. But my erring is also about being alone and adrift out here. I'm wayward with place, dizzy with the figment called discovery.

To try to break the impasse I sidle west along a dusty gully of sheoaks. The surface of fallen branchlets underfoot is soft yet annoyingly loose. Small, bare-domed granite boulders bulge out of this drab mat of needles. Not many signs of life. These sheoak woods so often feel forsaken. The breeze skims through the canopy above with a husky whisper. Inside there's nothing green or lush, no flowers, nothing in shoot. But I do meet a lone kangaroo ahead, standing like a figurine among the trunks and low branches. We stare blankly at each other for a few seconds. I move on but when I look again the roo is gone without a

sound or trace, as if it's a sharp movie edit.

Thankfully, the next little valley is more promising. It too drops steeply to the shore. However there's a way down, a skinny spur of dirt and gravel I wobble along, grabbing grass tussocks to keep my balance until I cut loose and dash and stumble to a pebbly beach. Clear air and open sky at last. Waves slap into the stones and between prows of rock jutting out to sea there are bright pools where orange kelp sways with the rise and fall of the sea.

It's a relief to finally be here at water level, scrambling along three kilometres of blocky and battered waterfront. There's another sensation too, a sneaky proprietorial twinge that the coast is mine for the taking. I'm wound up by the idea that this is terra incognita, a place unknown.

The thing is, I've asked around in the district and I can't find anyone who's walked this bit of the island, at least not down here among the rocks at the water's edge. The place is not on the radar; it

doesn't really lead anywhere. One bloke, a fifth generation islander, said to me: "You can't get along there 'cos of the cliffs. It's just too bloody steep and there's too much swell for a boat to land."

And yet, this spot is not that remote. There are farm tracks nearby on top of the headland and this whole shadowy run of coast is on view from Cape Willoughby. Being lucky enough to work at the lighthouse there, I've spent years gawking across the bay to these shores. It's an odd thing to look every day at a place that's hiding in plain sight, a place where no one goes, a place that in its own ambit is as wild as anywhere you and your mates might care to crow about.

When rolling Southern Ocean swells bend around our end of the island the bay here is one big amphitheatre of breaking waves. Their last act is to charge headlong into the cliffs along this shore. I can watch them all day. Big spume-topped waves hurtling onto the rocks. Spray blasting

skyward and cannon-like booms juddering across the bay. I've seen squally afternoons of rainbows here, tornado-strength winds and lightning skewering the heavens. On some calm autumn days silky-white sea fog pours over the headland like cream from a jug. Out in the bay there are dolphin pods, salmon schools and occasionally the shiny snout of a seal breaking the surface. Through mid-year, southern right whales rest up close to shore. Skulking below in the seagrass shallows, they surface for air, exhaling a whoosh of spray with an echoey bass note like someone letting rip into a PVC pipe.

Season after season the pull of this coast has intensified. So too the private torment of not knowing it up close. There were sharp winter mornings when early light would spear into the deep recesses of the headland and I could spot paperbarks perched tantalisingly on high like ships in a bottle. And one February afternoon I was convinced I could see a large tinny suddenly washed ashore in a cove, its aluminium hull glinting in the sunlight. I kept peering through Dad's old pair of binos, fantasising that I could somehow get there to claim salvage and seize the vessel of my dreams.

Now, at last, I'm on the case. Of course there's no tinny for me to snaffle. But given the hardcore geology here you can trace the illusion. This entire headland is flanked by tilted strata, gunmetal-dark and angled at a very rakish fifty degrees or so. Down at the shoreline the sea and storms have done their thing, chomping away at the battlements to open up coves and create a tumble of polished blocks and ramps. And, in my defence, when washed by the waves the long hull-sized slabs here do acquire a deceptive alloy gleam.

The reality is, just walking the shoreline is prize enough. It starts easy - a cobbled strip of grey, soccer ball sized boulders.

Driftwood is heaped up high on the beach. The air has the mineral whiff of freshly opened oyster mixed the scent of boobiala in flower. There is endless distraction among the rocks. Mottled shore crabs working the watery gaps among the limpets, and tidal shallows filled with strappy fronds of seaweed, fine coralline algae and sea grapes. Soon, however, the way forward is blocked by steep buttresses. I scuttle over the first to a small alcove inlet, but the next is too steep. So I wait for the wave surge to subside and skitter out among the pools, hopping wildly from boulder to slippery boulder.

This is a tableau straight out my childhood on the mainland at nearby Encounter Bay. So many days alone with the sea, a scrawny kid mucking about on sharp rocks. Even the lithology was the same. Ancient sediments canted upright in steely-dark slabs standing side by side with bulging granite intrusions. As a youngster I courted the sensation of being on this fretted edge, the waves taunting me to have a go. It was an obsession that grew in spite of - or perhaps because of - a setting where the hazards were ever-apparent.

In our family there was deep, unspoken wariness about the sea. We embraced the warnings of the bay's fishermen - brothers Bill and George Ewen - who cautioned us about the reefs and rocks. There were plenty of other local stories of ferocious storms and boats capsizing, of night rescues and people being washed off cliffs near The Bluff. Our family lost a couple of dinghys and on a few fishing trips we got swamped by waves. But by and large we were lucky. In many ways the most dangerous zone was the craggy water's edge and I was just old enough to remember the day at Petrel Cove when my brother tripped and gashed his head open on a serrated blade of rock. As blood streamed from his scalp our sister ran

screaming: "Jason's dead! Jason's dead!"

Yet for all the dramas these margins between land and sea never lost their attraction. It was where stuff happened, where you found things hidden in sheltered pools and washed in with the surging tides. Discovery twinned with danger - that was the deal. And the self-defining thrill of it all stays with you, even decades later.

After skirting two more outcrops I reach a much larger bluff that dips straight into deep water. With no way round I'm forced to clamber, hauling myself up an overhanging gap until I'm wedged inside chimney-style. It's precarious and a bit of an idiotic thing to do on my own. But I make it up to the crest of the rocks only to meet an even steeper drop into another cove with its own shingle beach. Above, a wind-bent paperbark lies horizontal among the lichen-covered blocks. There are yet more trees roosting high in the next gully, pale parchment trunks against a cascade of green. It's a surreal hanging garden - the one I've been gazing at for years from the lighthouse.

At this point I realise I'm not much more than halfway along this shore. The headland is overwhelming. Waves are thumping in below and the spurs above look impossibly steep and scrubby. There's no sign that anyone's been this way before. Maybe, just maybe, I'm the first to attempt this - at least for a very long time.

I'm still partial to a bit of old school exploring. That delicious sensation of breaking ground and making the only foot prints on a lonely beach. Though for me it's not about heroic conquest or bragging rights. Any claims I might care to make on this place are trifling. No, it's more a personal, Robinson Crusoe kind of thing and a connection to the restless solitude of my childhood.

Ultimately it doesn't matter who has been here before. What really counts is the act of doing. The rewards of struggle. Slumped horizontal like a paperbark I watch the waves shunt into the boulder beach below. There's that odd clunking music of the rocks being knocked together by the force of the water and then the suction hiss of the waves retreating. I'm strung out and on the edge. The headland looming above and the sea below. Not sure yet how I'll make it back. And it feels great. I love this haphazard intimacy. Nature inexhaustible. An undying mystery. All-powerful. The quiet release in being owned by the place. That's the discovery every time. W



Cape Wiltourby lighthouse can be seen against the horizon.

A contributor since *Wild* issue 3, Quentin Chester is the author of several books about wild places. quentinchester.com

A full-page photograph of a dense forest. In the foreground, a small stream flows over moss-covered rocks, creating a soft, blurred effect. The water is a milky white color. The surrounding forest is thick with green foliage and tall, thin tree trunks. Sunlight filters through the canopy, creating dappled light on the forest floor.

Japan's Highway of PRINCESSES

*The forested mountains of Japan's Central Alps are home to the Asiatic black bear.
Photo: © Shigeo Kato*

In his first feature contribution to the magazine, editor
Campbell Phillips searches for wilderness in the heart of Japan

Ring bell against bears,' the hand-painted sign proclaimed, accompanied by a line of kanji and a cartoonish illustration of a bear, below which hung a brass bell.

"Maybe we should ring the bell, just in case?" Anna asked.

The path ahead slipped down through tall cedars on the shadowed side of the hill which, coupled with the bear warning, created a sense of foreboding. However, the sky above the canopy was bright blue and I could see our path would quickly emerge again from the gloom of the woods. Besides, I wouldn't mind seeing a bear.

"How about we just go carefully?" I said. "The bears are sure to steer clear of humans and we're not very far from the last town. It seems unlikely we'll run into any."

Within five minutes of beginning the descent on the darkened hillside, stepping carefully over the path's rough stones, we heard a bell ring out clearly somewhere below us. A few minutes later another chimed out from the mountains ahead. It appeared there were more bells in these woods than bears, and more people besides. I wasn't likely to get quite the wild experience I'd been hoping for.

My partner and I were descending into the Kiso Valley in Japan's Central Alps, following the path known as the Nakasendo Way – the ancient walking route that connected Edo (now Tokyo) and Kyoto. The area is rich in cultural sites and offers a mixture of both alpine, rural and wilderness landscapes, so I had been looking forward to hiking in the region for a long time. A bear sighting would have taken the experience to another level.

Although Asiatic black bears (*Ursus thibetanus*) are present throughout Honshu (Japan's largest and most populous island), I had discovered that their population is controlled by local hunting groups and individuals not due to be culled are scared away from population centres in order to minimise the chance of a negative encounter. The bells ringing in the woods of the Kiso Valley meant there was almost no chance of spotting one in the wild. In fact, I was more likely to sample bear meat at a local ryokan (traditional Japanese inn) than I was to see one on the loose.

The Nakasendo Way cuts a path stretching 534 kilometres through the middle of Honshu. For much of Japan's feudal history this route (or the collection of ancient

roads that comprise it) could be considered the major arterial, shuttling goods, people and information back and forth between the two major capitals. Due to the frequent friction that existed between Edo and Kyoto, the Nakasendo could almost be seen as a linchpin or perhaps a seesaw. It was the axis along which power between the west and east was balanced.

Throughout the Edo period (1603-1868), various Emperors found their court challenged by the rising power of a shogunate in the west. As history has shown in cultures the world over, these problems are most expediently solved with a fortuitous marriage between the two feuding families. At least seven princesses were married into the Imperial court during this era of Japanese history, delivered along the Nakasendo Way on lacquered palanquins. It is for this reason that the route has also been dubbed Hime no kaido, 'The Highway of Princesses'.

The layering of Japanese history means that this route has evolved according to the needs of the time, and today is criss-crossed by formed roads, railways and various other paths along its length. In the more built-up areas the path itself is asphalt, while at its wildest it becomes unformed grit winding between alpine conifers. For sections in between these two extremes, the path is clad in what's known as *ishidatami* – a traditional style of stone paving that lends the landscape a depth of history and wonder. Walking on these sections of the trail forces you to wonder how many thousands of others have made the same journey, including legendary characters such as the expert swordsman Miyamoto Musashi (1584-1645), or haiku master Matsuo Basho (1644-1694).

The original route included 69 station or post towns, which constituted the major resting stops for messengers, travellers and betrothed princesses alike. To walk the whole of its length would take most walkers more than a week (tour companies offer a guided, 11-day option), and it is generally considered of moderate, but not extreme, difficulty. Where many tourists would simply hop on the shinkansen to travel between Tokyo and Kyoto in around 3.5 hours, walking the Nakasendo provides a novel cultural experience that no amount of urban tourism can instil. Even better, travellers to the region can tailor the length of their walking route according to the amount of time they have and their proficiency as a hiker. Accommodation ranges from

ryokans and hotels to dedicated campgrounds; the route can therefore be made to cater for just about any breed of walker, from mild to wild.

Our journey along the Nakasendo began when we alighted at the train station at Nakatsugawa, Gifu Prefecture. Just under 330 metres above sea level, Nakatsugawa has long since evolved beyond the post town it once was into a small city of over 53,000. We had arrived at lunchtime on a day in early October, and so the weather was exceedingly pleasant – somewhere between 20 and 25 degrees. In the mountains that surround Nakatsugawa, the maples and ginkgoes were only just beginning to blush with autumnal colour. After a light meal in the centre of town, we made some last-minute adjustments to our packs before picking up our route heading northeast towards the foothills of Mount Ena. This was the shortest day of walking during our time on the Nakasendo (we travelled just over six kilometres in the entire afternoon), but it also contained some of the more steep ascents of the entire journey, which were then rewarded with fantastic views of the Kiso River, the surrounding pastures, occasional villages and proud mountain peaks. The first few hours were spent walking swiftly uphill and then down again to reach the small post town of Ochiai, beyond which the Kiso flows through a series of deep gorges. After three hours of some of the most serious inclines either of us had walked in recent years, every little shrine and temple offered a much-needed pause that we would use to take a sip of water and allow the sweat to cool on our brows. We crossed a bridge over the Kiso as an unidentifiable raptor circled lazily above us before embarking yet again on another steep

climb, which marked the last sealed section of journey for the day. Crossing a country road we encountered our first real woods of the journey, as well as our first stretch of ishidadami.

The air temperature became much cooler in the dappled shade of the trees and the ishidadami followed only a slight incline as we neared our destination for that night – Shinchaya. It was here that we had booked lodgings at a ryokan and we were pleasantly surprised to find we were the only guests that evening. In fact, we'd not encountered a single tourist all afternoon; the only other hiker had been an elderly (yet spritely) Japanese man with a camera, backpack and rolled up sleeping mat strapped to his back. This sense of exclusivity wasn't to last long as the next day we embarked on the section of the Nakasendo that is renowned for being the most unchanged over the centuries since the golden age of the Edo Period. We had left Shinchaya that morning, striking out for

Magome post town, the main thoroughfare of which bears uphill towards Magome Pass, which marks the entrance to the Kiso Valley. Magome itself is something of a tourist destination due to the writings of Shimazaki Toson, which largely describes the area during the Meiji Restoration of the late 19th Century. As a result, thousands of tourists descend on the town each year, with a few hundred descending on the town in the hours that we were passing through. Up in the mountain passes and down again into the Kiso Valley, the Nakasendo alternates between formless gravel and ishidadami and is frequented only by the occasional walkers. It is here we spent our time haunted by the tolling of bear bells, hopping over mountain streams and stopping at the local teahouse for lunch.

While we may not have spotted any black bears, we could sense the presence of the natural heritage everywhere. The pristine waters supported a multitude of frogs,



A welcoming tanuki statue greets visitors in Tsumago



Tsumago Castle may be little more than a few blocks of stone, but its commanding view over the Kiso Valley reveals the strategic value of the site



birds and insects, and while they went unseen, we were nevertheless aware that the mammals were never far from hand. Mountain goats, racoon-dogs (tanuki), foxes and deer knew better than to spend their afternoons by the side of the walking track. Stopping briefly at Odaki-Medaki Falls (the twin falls where Musashi is said to have foregone his lust for a woman in order to continue his studies in the art of swordplay), we continued through a woodland habitat that combined the beauty of the Japanese maple, cedar and bamboo all in one, before eventually arriving at the hamlet of O-tsumago, which lies just a 10-minute walk from Tsumago post-town. Tsumago is also known for its importance in terms of its cultural heritage, and the local museum describes life in the valley from pre-history, through feudal times and right through to the industrial revolution during the Meiji Restoration. It is here that we learned the entire valley was used as a kind of giant

timber mill from the 1700s and into the 20th Century. The Kiso River was also privatised in Meiji's time and the resulting hydroelectric dams and stations stick out of place and time as artefacts of Japan's prior nationalist zeal. After exploring this area we spent the night in O-tsumago before doubling back for a long day of walking towards the next major town – Kiso-Fukushima.

The walk to Kiso-Fukushima surpasses 20 kilometres, the first half or so of which is primarily uphill and luckily we had awoken to the coldest day (around 16 or so degrees) that we experienced during our entire stay in Japan, with the mountain peaks shrouded in clouds the entire day.

Just outside of Tsumago we took the opportunity to visit the ruins of Tsumago Castle, a hilltop fort of which all that remains are a few weathered stones. It is said that this castle was the site of an historic battle in 1584 in which a few hundred local Kiso fighters stood against thousands of enemy soldiers. The view it commands over the town of Tsumago proves why the site was chosen as a strategic hold.

The way proceeded through a mixture of forested and sculpted landscapes, alternating between the tree-clad flanks of mountains and well-tended Japanese gardens with the occasional shrine in between. We were gradually returning from the remnants of Japanese cultural antiquity to the bustling modernity that immediately springs to mind in thinking of Japan today. Arriving in Midono reinforced this impression, with its two, broad iron bridges, railway line and imposing hydro plant.

This is the quintessential, natural-cultural experience that can be had in Japan. Yes, there are regions of Japan (see Hokkaido) that offer something closer to a typical wilderness experience, but nowhere is the border between nature and stewardship more blurred than it is in the Central Alps. From the very earliest hunter-gatherer tribes of the region to every proceeding migration and social revolution ensuing it, the local Japanese culture has ingested, absorbed and inculcated its surrounds in such a way that there is no definition between natural and cultural heritage anymore. This was confirmed for me in the one instance we came within any proximity of a bear near Magome Pass, the only indication of which was a profusion of firecrackers set to scare the animal off, which we could hear from a kilometre or two away. For me, the heavily populated cedar forests of Japan lie in stark contrast to the many wilderness areas we find available in Australia, which rather demonstrate a lack of stewardship than of too much stewardship. [W](#)

THE NAKASENDO WAY

Travel

Flights to Japan vary significantly in price, but the Autumn period is often considered off-peak for international tourism, so try to book for this time well in advance.

Japan is much easier to get around if you've pre-booked a Japan Rail Pass prior to departure at any travel agent licensed to sell them. JR Passes are sold for seven, 14 or 21-day timespans.

Tours

Tours of the Nakasendo are readily available, however Walk Japan offers a self-guided service that simplifies the entire process. Its guidebooks are renowned for their detail, maps and even tips for ensuring against cultural faux pas.

Alternatively, travellers can seek to make their own way by contacting local tourism boards and information centres. English maps are available from most train stations.

Accommodation

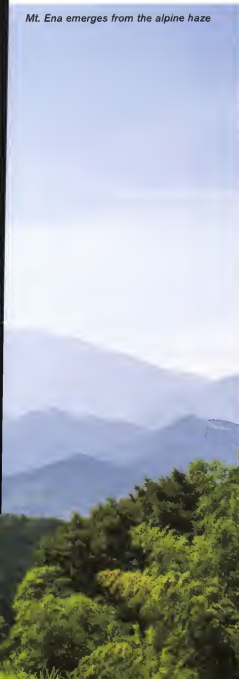
Booking ryokans is the most convenient way to travel along the Nakasendo, and this is arranged through your tour company or via tourism boards. Few of the inn owners speak English, so it's important to learn at least a few key phrases before you go.

It is possible to camp along the route as there are several privately owned campgrounds. However, this isn't generally encouraged for unaccompanied western visitors.



www.walkjapan.com

Mt. Ena emerges from the alpine haze



Invisible footprints, silent whispers

A windswept beach south of Temma.
Photos: Alexander Robey



The author reaches for his camera

Accompanied by his brother, *Alexander Robey* explores Tasmania's Tarkine Coast in a pilgrimage of acknowledgement for the island's original inhabitants

Bleached shells, animal bones and stone fragments lay scattered among a windswept coastline. A dynamic, stunning natural landscape whispered the silent wisdom of invisible footprints held by the tide of time. I had to connect in person to the spirit calling of the Tarkiner Tribe, the traditional owners of the Tarkine Coast for at least 4000 years. From the northwest corner of Tasmania down the west coast to Sandy Cape, I harnessed the wind and the waves to journey by kayak, and explore by foot

sandy beaches and sculptured rocky headlands. It was the art of humble beachcombing with empty hands and heartfelt appreciation. I journeyed beside my younger brother Charles, who also paddled a Roscoe Arctic Raider expedition sea kayak.

The sandy-desert landscape of Robbins Passage vanished as a forceful tide engulfed a dramatic transformation and I rubbed my salty eyes with disbelief. An eerie, early-morning fog stood in contrast with a vibrantly streaked eucalyptus trunk

scribbled with natural lines that traced the gateway to the past. The Parperloihener band of the North West tribe once knew these sandy tide lines.

My cautious mind lifted with the fog as the swift current, encouraged by the bursting sun, catapulted our kayaks west. Abundant skates waved us on from the sea grass floor as dozens of white-tipped swans observed our enthusiastic antics to avoid the maze of sand bank dead ends to Woolnorth Point. The forceful currents' united alliance with the southwesterly wind threatened to blow us north off Kangaroo Island into the unprotected waters of Bass Strait. I had no desire for another Bass Strait kayak crossing at that time.

Our tent pitched within metres of the tide line in a small, protected cove of Davidsons Bay, the prospect of the wind-battered islands dotted offshore begged a trip in itself. Larger Hunter Island, Three Hummock Island and more than a dozen smaller rocky features, islets and islands lit up with whitewash explosions.

Determined to fish and with the need to avoid the bull kelp surrounding the inner rocks, we swam to the outer rocks. A minute late, a cruising shark prompted consideration of the food chain. I admired the lengths traditional Parperloihener people went to source food.

"Did you pee in your wet suit?" I joked with Charles.

"It was you, wasn't it?" he laughed. "You can swim back with the fish!" Respectfully exploring the tideline to avoid private property, I imagined Flinders' first reaction as he sailed to confirm the separation of Van Diemen's Land. He (appropriately) named Cape Grim in 1798 as gale force wind and house-sized giant waves smashed the impenetrable cliffs.

The Woolnorth Peninsula in early European settlement was prominent for pastoral use and lucrative timber production. These were the grounds of conflict between the North West Tribe and the settlers, escalating in 1828 to what has been termed the 'Cape Grim Massacre' at 'Victory Hill'. Varying accounts exist of the retaliation of settlers to the slaughter of sheep between six and 30 lives were lost.

Offshore sat The Doughboys: literally two 50-metre-high humps of rock covered in native grass. Seven hectares in size, the mutton birds stamped their nesting claim on this fortress from land predators. The passage offered only partial resistance to the indigenous women of the North West Tribe brave enough to swim to hunt the

birds and harvest eggs. It rendered our swim insignificant.

After a predawn trip consideration, the forecasted northwesterly wind swung to settle both my nervous apprehension and the massive pumping swell. The notorious cape distracted from our full appreciation of the excursion as the forceful tailwind, a four-knot tide and the prevailing swell etched another permanent concerned frown line across my brow. The ominous swell exploded on the outer flanks before it rocketed through onto the cliff-lined coastline. The solid four-to-five metre swell bounced back to collide hundreds of metres back out to sea, launching the kayaks on the swell crests as we later disappeared into swallowing troughs. 'Brace, breathe, paddle!' My mantra focused as the wind pushed along. My salt-affected eyes stung like raw onion remedy. I now felt initiated to the west coast swell.

Charles and I committed to a nerve-racking 30-kilometre paddle to Marrawah with only a passing glance to Mount Cameron West, also known as Perminghana, with its 2000-year-old carvings.

"The motifs themselves consist of a variety of geometric or non-figurative forms, such as circles, trellises, and rows of dots. Many of the circles are parts of composite designs, with their interior spaces occupied by crosses, parallel lines or other circles. On a nearby site there were depicted the tracks of a large bird such as an emu. These motifs were made by punching or grinding a series of holes into the surface of the calcarenite and then abrading the ridges between them to form deep incised lines. A few large pointed core tools of hard quartzite and basalt were found in the excavations and these might have been the chisels of the prehistoric sculptors."*

At Green Point, the southern end of Ann Bay beside the township of Marrawah, even the smallest of the swell at three-to-four metres brought too much risk to both craft and limb. Waves exploded acoustically like dynamite as we snuck between reefs venturing south.

I pulled a bag of nuts and chocolate from my life jacket pocket and practically inhaled it to fuel my fatigued muscles. The break had to be short before the lactic acid in my shoulders hardened to concrete. I watched several surfers catch enormous waves off the headland and realised my hypocrisy when I thought "isn't it too sharky to be out on the water?"

Large swell persisted at West Point, Nongor to the Peerapper tribe. 'Semi-sedentary summer "villages" took advantage of the abundant coastal birds and elephant seal colony. Analysis of the faunal remains in these middens



Replica traditional canoe

NINGENNAH TUNAPRY

To give knowledge and understanding of the feats of the Tasmanian Indigenous People to travel to offshore islands in canoes to fish, hunt and gather mutton birds, seals and crayfish.

In 1831, indigenous leader Woureddy shared voyages with George Augustus Robinson to offshore islands. Three Hummock Island (once five kilometres offshore before rising sea levels, as revealed by the petroglyphs) Petra Blanca and Eddystone Rock (25 kilometres off the southeast cape) were among those named.

Stringy bark from the swamp tea tree (or paperbark) was used for construction along the west, northwest and south coasts and swamp reeds on the east coast. Three individual bundles of lashed bark were tied together with long lashings, tapered at the bow and stern to form a stable, five-metre-long craft that was seaworthy enough for the task.

The largest of these vessels were said to carry seven or eight people along with dogs and spears. The men would sit towards the front with women behind, along with small clay pots used to transport fire.

Captain Sarah Parry of the Windeward Bound and a team of indigenous men built the first bark canoe in 170 years with bark from Bruny Island, which is on display in the Ngingenneh Tunapry exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG) Hobart.

revealed young weaning calves were a staple of their diet, before winter months were spent foraging in smaller groups along the coast and venturing to shelter inland.*

A maze of reefs and exposed rocky platforms forced a chess game. Without warning, periodic large swells sucked up over exposed bulk help on partially submerged rocks appeared as barrelling curls large enough to drive a truck through. The spectacle was incredible! The Arthur River mouth, originally home to the Manegin Tribe, is the northern flank of the Arthur Pieman Conservation Area. I strained and pleaded with the rising and dropping swell to leave me high for a second more, to catch more than a fleeting glimpse of the possibility of safe passage to shore. Stubbornly, the ocean toyed with me. The constant, unrelenting sets soldiered in against the river flow and broke across the river mouth. The river spewed tannin-stained freshwater and threw wooden torpedoes – once ancient trees and a prize for craftsmen – in its currents. Driftwood metres deep littered the beach, a warning to my fragile kayak! The bronze plate at the onshore lookout with the poem written by Brian Indler titled *The Edge of the World* seemed appropriate. The wind dropped as forecasted and further south the offshore reefs offered friendship and safe passage. "Lean back, paddle hard!" screamed in my head as I surfed an exhilarating wave as my kayak hummed safely to shore at Sundown Point.

My cramped legs protested sudden action as I washed onto the sand and we were immediately beset by the putrid aroma of rotting kelp, swarms of circling flies and a mosquito squadron attack. What about the 40 registered Aboriginal motifs? At that moment we were more interested in survival.

A break in the swell saw us back in our kayaks faster than a rat up a drainpipe. One breaking wave gave me a farewell slap across the face before I reached deeper water. The next landmarks, Sarah Ann Rocks and then Couta Rocks, with its spectacular outer formations, shielded a small harbour and sandy beach. The swell pumped too large with short windows between sets to sneak in. We opted to land around the next headland in Rebecca Bay, on the long sandy Lady Kathleen Beach. It was a long, 70-kilometre paddling day. Aching shoulders protested the portage where Charles set up camp in sand blow while I raced the kilometre to Couta Rocks to obtain drinking water. A delicious, home-dehydrated beef and vegetable curry on rice steamed on my return.



The wind picked up in the night and sprayed sand everywhere. At 4am my alarm seemed like a terrible joke, so too the chore to wash sand out of my paddling clothes. The wind bit nastily and my cries of distress as cold wet paddling clothes smothered my warm body amused the suspicious wildlife. I watched Charles launch out through the crashing morning swell. "What took you so long?" he laughed, when I finally made a break out. After an hour's paddle avoiding reefs and breaking swell, we reached the fishing community of Temma. It blew 33 knots at Cape Grim earlier, a timely escape! A local

shared his knowledge of the best route to zigzag through the reefs and rocky gutters further south. A kayaking trip seemed to attract shark stories! His best friend lived just south of here: a 28-foot great white shark. "Seals eat my fish, so anything that eats seals is my friend," he explained with a laugh.

We edged south to the large sandy Kenneth Bay fighting a northeasterly wind that relentlessly forced on route to Africa. The solid four-metre waves pumped the long bay, before we cruised to shore on two-foot waves into Venables Corner, the northern side of Sandy Cape. It was a big



Charles looks out over Robbins Passage

effort for a 30-kilometre day.

Finally! We were at Sandy Cape.

Large, lichen-dusted granite formed the cape with a dotted scattering of smaller, rounded boulders across the sand dunes. A quick hot meal gave life to our weary bodies. Exploration a must; I had to find the midden that inspired my cultural fascination with the region.

Unfortunately, the cape is a well-known, four-wheel drive hotspot with high sand dunes within the 100,000-hectare Arthur Pieman Conservation Area. Tracks crossed without care or order and to my horror,

the large midden lay flattened by mindless vandalism. I felt shocked and emotional when I saw what few shells remained. The actions of a few contaminate all, an ongoing battle for Tasmania Parks and Wildlife.

*'The midden sites have some of the best evidence of the lifestyle of Aboriginal people in the area, particularly the apparent absence of fish bones, presence of marine and terrestrial animal bones, which in conjunction with the hut sites, are an important expression of their specialised way of life.'** Of the few remaining shells, a rainbow-striated, sun-bleached abalone shell,

broken, fragile and weathered, caught my eye. Once strong and resilient to the force of the western swell pounding the granite, an indigenous woman had pried it off with a sharpened stick. It was her role to forage in the shallows. I crouched down on my knees in the sand, paused to respect the traditional owners and imagined life centuries ago, abundant in food, but harsh in weather and environment. Their skill honed and passed on, my skill and nerve nowhere near theirs. Cold water and pounding waves were my first deterrent, sharks and currents the second, and the reassurance of a warm meal from my supplies a third. My eye led away from the scrambled shells to spinifex grass flapping in the wind on top of mounds of eroded sand. A foraging gull caught my attention, its cries sounded like a human voice carried in the wind. The leftovers from seafood feasts would have provided easy pickings for gulls back then, but no gull alive would remember such events. The last remaining indigenous inhabitants relocated to Flinders Island off the northeast point of Tasmania in 1833. Under instructions of Governor Arthur, George Robinson promised safe passage and family reunion to mediate the relocation. They never returned. Missionary James Backhouse described the impact during his experience at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. *'For the exiled Aboriginal women, the poetry of their native streams had possessed their souls, for when they spoke of their old haunts beside the rushing rivers they were filled with grief.'**



Cape Grim and The Doughboys.
Photo courtesy of Woolnorth Tours.



The remains of an indigenous midden

I had only scratched the surface of the rich tapestry of cultural and environmental heritage that forms the Tarkine coastline, but the place is now etched in my memory.

Bordering Australia's largest temperate rainforest, it's a place like no other I have visited and my words, could not accurately portray the vista. The backdrop of the Norfolk Range, which lies parallel to the coastline, acts as a barrier to the greater region down which rivers flow like tears down the women's faces to form and feed the extensive coastal heathland, button grass plains, moors and pockets of thick forest. The clouds cast shadows over

the green and gold button grass plains, creating their own dynamic art piece. Dark shadows indicated the cutting of a creek where cascades flowed to cut steep gorges, in places blanketed by thick vegetation. The amber landscape invited an afternoon saunter. Yet those golden plains are no yellow brick roads, where wombats and quolls dominate the tracks, nose to ground travel is the only stance permitted. Underneath the diverse vegetation, white

quartz gravel sat under millions of years of shifting sand, soil and growth, with the only visible white offered by flicks of snow grass.

Parrots, quails, firetails, honeyeaters, cockatoo, wrens and currawongs feed and rest among the banksia, melaleuca and peppermint eucalyptus. The sun's gold filter enhanced the yellow flowers of the banksia trees with dangling yellow moss and green lichen growing off branches and over rocks. The afternoon landscape differed significantly to the shadowed morning. Strongly masculine, yet gracefully feminine and colourful, rounded and jagged, smashing and calm, permissive and non-accessible; this was a land of contrast.

My eye led to a brilliant burst of green carpet, the native succulent 'pigface' with pointed triangular leaves and bright pink flowers. I picked and bit a green tip, an indigenous antioxidant and anti-inflammatory remedy with a refreshing apple taste. The coastal groundsel took over behind a boulder with green stems and bright yellow flowers. I cast about for the common windswept spider orchid, 28 endangered plant species grew at the cape. Seemingly individually insignificant in the great expanse, each ingredient added to the dramatic and captivating landscape. It was a moment of reassurance to consider my place and my contribution.

A pair of red-legged oystercatchers picked and squabbled along the tide line. I spied two trawlers anchored sheltered on the western side of the cape, a reassurance of the forecast. A calm ocean morning lured an onward journey, best left told another time.

I had only scratched the surface of the rich tapestry of cultural and environmental heritage that forms the Tarkine coastline, but the place is now etched in my memory. Invisible footprints and silent whispers journeyed with me, already entreating my return. W

^{*} Australian Government, Department of the Environment; Australian Heritage Database. National Heritage Places: Western Tasmania Aboriginal Cultural Landscape. 2013.

Private property at Woolnorth extends to the high tide mark (and not to the fence line or unlike parts of Tasmania, to within 10 metres of the tide line). Please contact The Van Diemens Land Company if visiting the region by kayak for permission.

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SONGLINES

of the Katherine River

Torn between illness and great wonder, *Dave Cauldwell* tries to develop an ear for the music of Nitmiluk National Park

A vast wetland expands before me, its waters capturing the azure reflection of a sky that seems bluer than any sky I've ever seen before. Wild pigs rummage in the mud. Four dead trees jut out of the water immediately before me. Their silvery branches poke at the sky as if they're striking a pose from Saturday Night Fever. Staying alive is tough out here in Nitmiluk National Park, but the indigenous people of this country know a few tricks. To the untrained eye, this wetland is bereft of

food. Yet Aboriginal women came here in the wet season to forage for turtles that burrowed into the mud. Telltale digging marks give the turtles away and they are easy prey, speared out from their muddy hiding places.

There comes a time when everything is revealed.

This land has many secrets, and for the next four days I intend to immerse myself in its abrasive expanse, searching for clandestine rock art sites that will give me an insight

into the lives of the people who used to dwell here. All up I'll cover around 40 kilometres, although my overall distance depends on Matt. He's walked this country many times and always takes different, spontaneous routes across it. He may not be indigenous, but Matt has spent a considerable amount of time camping in the bush with Long John, an Aboriginal elder. Matt spends a couple of months each year hiking, hunting and bunking down sans tent and mattress with Long John.



Their friendship has been forged by respect and trust, and Long John has shown Matt the location of many hidden caves. He's only permitted to show me a small number. We leave the swamp pigs behind and walk through highland savannah atop an escarpment. Orange flowers bloom on stringybark trees, a sign that the dry season is just beginning. Spinifex grass pricks my exposed legs. Some tussocks tickle but most feel like fire ant bites. There's a sadistic thrill in not knowing what sensation is coming next.

There are few landmarks around, the odd termite skyscraper rising three metres off the ground, but I'm guessing that Matt probably doesn't need a map. Resonance is his compass. This land has a vibration, an undulating oscillation that speaks in codes that cannot be documented topographically. I'm not in tune with what they are, being like a virgin in this scenery of heightened contrast. The only thing I am in tune with is how disgruntled my body feels. A week ago, I hobbled off a plane from India with a hideous foot infection. My left foot is still swollen and barely fits into my boot, but my stomach is even less happy. We're miles

from anywhere, but I can feel the first signs of gastroenteritis gurgling in my stomach. I try not to focus on this, instead losing myself in the majesty of twisting gorges. We walk along the banks of the Katherine River and on top of escarpments that overlook the gorges, across vast plateaus filled with swaying spear grass. Looking across this dusty land, it's hard to believe that Aboriginal tribes used to live here. Their former abodes are literally right beneath our feet, hidden in overhangs nestled under the escarpment. Drawn faintly onto the walls of these clandestine caves, tribal artwork is the only remaining legacy of the people – scrawled songlines faded in the dust.

We lay down our packs and dart off the escarpment into the bush, down a slope littered with loose rocks. We duck and limbo beneath branches, zigzagging deeper into a mess of limbs. It doesn't look like there's anything down here. Indeed, it's been 11 months since Matt last came here – 11 months since anyone has battled through this undergrowth. Contemporary indigenous communities have no reason to venture out here anymore.

As I peel yet another branch off my face, Matt admits that he's not 100 per cent sure if we're going the right way. The scent of mint permeates the air as we burrow deeper into the undergrowth through a tangle of cattleweed.

Eventually the undergrowth recedes and we emerge beside a small cave. Many years ago, the sedimentary sandstone of caves like this used to be riverbeds, which explains why some have ripples on the ceiling. There are also grooves in the rock, as if a bear has been sharpening its claws. Matt tells me it's where tribesmen used to hone their stone tools. Microbat droppings litter the floor and a large buffalo bone is perhaps the remnant of an ancient feast. Tribes lived in this cave year-round until white pastoralists arrived in the Territory in the late 1800s. Many tribespeople were employed by European settlers on cattle stations and only returned to this cave during the wet season (November to April) when their labour was no longer required.

Matt takes a pew on a rock and leaves me to find the cave art for myself. The paint has faded somewhat and the drawings aren't obvious at first, but on the roof of the cave



Relaxing in one of the many beautiful gorges that gives the region such dramatic appeal
Photos: Dave Caudwell



Just one example of the exquisite rock art that can be found in this area

I eventually discern a rainbow serpent, geese and an emu being cooked on a campfire. Mimi spirits, it is said, have painted any pictures on the rocks high above pictures of humans. These long and slender inter-dimensional beings live in caves and are believed to have taught Aboriginal tribes how to hunt and use fire. Cave art is like a diary entry. It provides a glimpse into days spent hunting or fishing; lots of fish drawn together could indicate a good haul or that fish were abundant in the area. As with all art, it's subjective. The Aboriginal people didn't just paint in caves. Wherever there was clay or ochre and a rocky canvas they would draw, either with their fingers or by using reeds chewed up at the end as simple brushes. What remains of this art today is mostly in overhangs



Matt is dwarfed by a termite mound



Crossing the Katherine River

the cave mouth, it's impossible to see where there would be any fish. Yet a force greater than any GPS guided the Aboriginal people: the power of their intuition. Through the bush they went exploring, led by spirits and the biorhythms of the Earth. Perhaps they could hear the flapping of fishes' fins as they tracked through the bush. Perhaps the rivers flowed through their dreams, re-emerging again at a cellular level, in a waking state of absolute knowing, that enabled them to weave through the bush and find food to survive. These were people that understood their environment on both intimate and intricate levels. Their resonance and affinity with their surroundings meant they were able to spot nature's subtle clues and plan hunting trips in accordance with the seasons. Flowers may not seem an obvious ally when it comes to hunting, but the lifecycle of one particular floral species was invaluable to indigenous tribes. Matt points out a kapok flower, its yellow petals fluttering on a slight breeze. To the Aboriginal people, whenever the kapok flowered it meant that turtles and crocodiles were out looking for mates. Tribes kept a keen eye out for when the petals dropped off and when a seedpod the

size of an egg formed: this was a sign that the turtles and the crocodiles had just buried their eggs and it was time to go foraging. If the seedpod turned brown and burst open, then they were too late because the eggs had hatched. The kapok is but one example of many intuitive relationships forged by the Aboriginal people over thousands of years of observation and the communication of oral history. Back up on the escarpment once more and we duck down again into another, more accessible cave. This one's a lot bigger. Empty snakeskins hang from various nooks crinkling and swaying in a zephyr. The drawings here are clearer. Near the entrance, an upside down man carries a boomerang. A large crocodile scales the wall next to him. It has a red outline and is filled with white clay, and has seemingly been painted over several other images. If I stare at the crocodile for long enough, then my eyes deceive me into thinking it's slowly inching up the wall. Many things are moving out here, even if they appear sedentary. This land has a pulse, a magic preserved because there are no shopping malls or high-rise apartments for kilometres. We make camp by the river. Stars shimmer

protected from the elements. While the paintings offer a subjective glimpse into indigenous history, it is very much a one-sided peek, as women weren't allowed to paint. Perhaps this is why a lot of cave art relates to hunting. Looking out into the mangled bush beyond

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as how you want to go there.



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in a wondrous kaleidoscope that threatens to make my head explode. It's a perfectly still night. The only thing moving is my bowels, but as I squat in the bushes, swallowing nausea, I think to myself that I couldn't be ill in a more beautiful place. And if it weren't for my gastro, then I wouldn't be marvelling at the night sky right now. I'd be sleeping in my tent, only dreaming that such a sky-scape was possible.

My gratitude for being up much of the night is less evident come morning. I'm grouchy and tired. Eating is like dicing with Russian roulette. In the middle of a light breakfast, I'm forced to dash off into the bushes. It's water only for today's hike, so it seems – although even that doesn't seem to be able to stay inside me.

We walk down a rocky slope, past a dribbling creek until we reach a gorge system and the banks of the Katherine River. Tiny fish nibble dead skin as I dangle my sweaty feet into the water. I'm exhausted yet primed for any sudden scramble to the bush. Matt leads us across topographic fault lines that involve scrambling over rocks. We

follow buffalo tracks and immerse ourselves in chest-high wisps of grass, walking beside pandanus plants that rattle in the wind. Matt points at the tail of a whipsnake as it vanishes into the scrub.

After passing freshwater croc tracks, we disappear into a plain of rippling grass. A mottled sky keeps the temperature in the early thirties as we walk towards a monolith-like rock reminiscent of a miniature Uluru. Apart from the rocky ridge flanking the Katherine River a kilometre or so to our right, this Uluru-like rock is the only protrusion in the landscape for kilometres. The atmosphere changes as we approach, as if there is a scratch in the songline we're following. Something has happened at this rock, something significant. Matt tells me we're entering a sacred Aboriginal site but isn't allowed to elaborate. He also instructs me not to take photographs.

We leave the sacred rocks behind and meander down to the banks of the Katherine River. Buffalo tracks disappear into banks of sand and we wade into the water. We climb until we're above the river, walking along the edge of another

escarpment and gazing down into a gorge system that winds away to the horizon. The way ahead undulates and the going is slow. My swollen foot has exponentially improved as my gastro has deteriorated. I have to pause for rest every 100 metres or so.

We deviate from the river. Green ants bungee behind my ears and bite me as I duck beneath branches. Eventually we arrive at an idyllic waterhole replete with waterfall. It's a great campsite; just a few metres away lies a lookout over the gorge. Matt and I perch above a dogleg in the Katherine River, our feet dangling over 100 metres above the sparkling water. We watch as the afternoon unfolds, as clouds change shape and shadows shimmer and disappear on the water.

There are many songlines encoded into this landscape, music sheets of texture, tone and transition. There are nuanced notes discernable not only with one's ears; infinite melodies abound in the scurrying of termites, in flowing waterways and in swaying grass. Some are fixed, some fleeting, but all are divine in their context of this symphonic geography. W



Approaching a mysterious
and sacred Aboriginal site

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Kakadu in the *wet*

Some think the rainy season is a time to avoid the Top End, but as *Bruce* and *Alistair Paton* have shown, Kakadu's swollen rivers and bursting falls couldn't be any more alluring than at this time of year





Previous page: Approaching storm at Ubirr. Clockwise from left: Flowering grevillea. Jim Jim Falls. Multi-tiered waterfall, southern Kakadu.

Alistair and Bruce Paton are photographers and longtime contributors to *Wild*. Alistair's first feature contribution appeared in issue 93 with the article 'Love in the Wilderness'.



www.wildsight.com.au



30 years of Willis

As he contemplates semi-retirement, *Keren Lavelle* took the opportunity to interview Russell Willis regarding his lengthy career in walking tours



*Russell Willis has made a living from providing unique wilderness adventures, experience in remote Australia and around the world since the mid-1980s.
Photos: Supplied*

Owner and operator of Willis's Walkabouts, Russell Willis has been talking bushwalkers out into some of Australia's most remote wilderness since the mid 80s. As such, he is extremely familiar with places such as the Kimberley, Kakadu and many other of Australia's iconic landscapes.

While he remains robust of mind and body despite his age, yet Willis has indicated that the time he spends administering his business from behind a desk is begin to wear on him. As he begins to consider how he can retire from paperwork and spend more time in the field, Wild took the opportunity to ask him about his life spent in the outdoors. The following is an edited transcript of that interview.

Can you tell us about one of your early wilderness walking experiences?

It was in New Zealand. I was based just outside of Wellington and actually I can't recall what little walk my walking club took me on first, but I can remember my first solo walk in New Zealand. I have still got a newspaper clipping that reads "American lost on Egmont". I wasn't lost; I knew exactly where I was. And I knew how the weather was, and I wasn't going outside that hut, thank you.

They were worried about you?

Well, they'd found the rental car I'd hired, and it was sitting in the parking lot for a couple of days. I'd found a hut with a sign, which read, "in case of emergency, break glass". I waited up there and I kept thinking, "It might clear at the top, so I could continue my walk". I was at a place called Phantom's Peak. The hut had huge steel beams stuck into the side of the mountain to hold it down, but it was still shaking to the point where I wouldn't sleep on the top bunk. Before the storm really hit, I'd started back down and the wind just picked me up... If it had dropped me down I would have kept

going down, but it dropped me more on the uphill side of the wind tunnel. I scrambled back up and waited two days until the weather changed.

How did Willis's Walkabouts come about?

I was teaching at a high school in Darwin and there was an ad in the NT News in June '74 saying, "anybody was interested in starting a bushwalking club, come to a meeting". It was a lunchtime meeting, but I had a spare lesson, so I went in, and was involved in setting up the Darwin Bushwalking Club. I was a very, very active for the first six years and then I took a year off to go travelling, before returning and becoming president again for a while.

Some bits of being a teacher weren't very interesting, but I'd had a great time taking kids bushwalking. One day I just had the idea: "I wonder if I could make a living out of that?"

I put a little ad in the Weekend Australian, and I got two clients for two wet season trips, one on each - in 1984.

I had some friends who made up the numbers. So my first commercial walk was in the wet. A year later, because the NT Education Department has a four-week school holiday in the middle of the dry season, I tried that but didn't get a customer. I thought about it more, and at the end of '85, I put a little ad in *Wild Magazine*. I'd also taken some long-service leave at half pay, bought myself a proper four-wheel-drive, and lo and behold, there were more customers.

How do you go about recruiting tour leaders?

Mostly they find me. At least three are former clients. Two, one of whom may eventually take the business over, are locals. She's about to take a year off to go travelling with her husband and family but is hoping to come back after they've been travelling for six months. One of the blokes who did a couple of trips for me years ago now has started his own business in Queensland.

What has been your favourite walk in the Top End?

There is no walk that I would like to do over and over and over again. Any walk that I list in my program is one that I'd like to do at least sometimes. If I had to pick, there's this place called Dinner Creek in southern Kakadu where I had my single most memorable moment ever on a bushwalk. I refuse to tell people exactly what it was except it was a geological feature that was unexpected. But for an experience of about a week, there's an area called Graveside or Bilkbilkmi. You need a permit just to drive in, and there's no point in driving in unless you're going to go for a walk, because the old waterhole where people used to camp is inhabited by large reptiles. But if you go walking into these other gorges, it's just a beautiful, leisurely walk. I'd set up a base camp for a couple of nights, explore two gorges all day in the shade and do lots of swimming in spring-fed creeks.

What has been your favourite walk overseas?

There's a two-day walk called the Harkerville Track in the Western Cape province of South Africa. There's the famous Otter Trail, which is always heavily booked out. The Harkerville is just as spectacular, and in some ways more so – it's shorter, you've got a nice hut at the halfway point so you don't have to carry a tent. But you do have to do things like hang off chains as you scumble around with sea waves breaking underneath you. It's just spectacular.

What is the main difference with organising overseas walks?

I hate to say it, but it's getting easier to organise walks overseas than in Australia. I could harp on about the nanny state. There's too many things that, "Oh, that's dangerous, you can't do it." Or you've got to fill out your 32nd form.

You've been quoted as saying that mental fitness is more important than physical fitness – how has that played out on the walks you've led?

I think the ultimate example was in the early 1990s. I had a wet season trip in Kakadu, divided into a number

of sections. A 29-year-old athlete from Melbourne was one of the people who signed up. There was also an English couple in their 60s who'd just come straight out of an English winter. In terms of fitness, the Melbourne guy had it – far, far fitter. But at the end of the first section, he was the one who left because he couldn't take it anymore. The 60-year-olds were quite happy – it was a mental thing. The Melbourne bloke expected something else. It was more challenging being out there away from everything. These days, of course, the challenge is being offline and disconnected.

What has changed most over your 30 years of walking in Kakadu?

Environmental changes, most of which are for the worst. Parks and Wildlife has never had the resources to properly manage it and many don't see the biggest changes because the most sensitive animals are all nocturnal, but the small mammals have been in decline for at least 20 years. All the studies say they've been going down. Northern cypress, *Callitris intratropica*, I've watched that disappearing from too much burning. I actually get very excited when I find, say, a one-and-a-half to two-metre tall tree because they're so rare. That's through almost everywhere in the north – too much burning; it's too easy to get fires going. Then of course there's the cane toads. They've had a massive impact. Some things are

somebody has been. I had heard that many times, but didn't grasp it until a very senior person came to the tourism committee I sit on, to talk about a man who had possibly drowned after having a heart attack at Jim Jim. The dead man was somebody he'd never met, didn't know, but he died on his land. And the incredible distress, I mean, we can't relate to it, but in some cases that results in areas getting closed.

There was an area at the top of Twinn Falls we used to have a wonderful time going down to different levels, watching parents and kids going down there. And the tour operators got a hold of it, and then they got worried about scaffolding and worried about safety and they made some rules. And you had to do A, B, C, D, if you wanted to take your tour group down there. And I think all but one organization was found not doing what they should have been doing: so it got closed, which is sad, because it's a fantastic area. Somebody had been killed by playing around too near the edge. Then again, you could probably get killed playing around up near the top, too.

In your last newsletter you announced you were heading for a 'grand finale'. What's involved in the grand finale?

It involves getting me out of the office. If I can get started going to do more of the office work then the business may continue in a very similar way. It is not big enough



starting to recover, which I've been really pleased to see. When the cane toads first hit, the water monitors pretty nearly disappeared. We're starting to see them coming back.

Freshwater crocs started disappearing in the high country long before the cane toads got there. When I first started walking in the '70s we'd see them very often and then mostly they disappeared. Not all, but the numbers declined... you just didn't see them anymore, except on rare occasions.

How has the giving the land back to the Aboriginal people and getting them involved in park management worked out?

Kakadu, as an example, has always been managed by traditional owners, whereas other areas are being given back for traditional management. There is a culture thing there – and it's kind of hard to argue with culture – but if an accident happens on Aboriginal land the traditional owners are somehow at fault, no matter how stupid

to support a full-time office resource, but I'm finding that I'm coping fine with the bushwalks, but I'm just not coping with the office work – I don't like the sitting there and doing all the paperwork.

So I'm just going to pick the trips I most want to do. I have started giving the other guys even more responsibility. I'm going to be rewriting the program; I'm not sure quite how. I know that there're trips all over the world I want to do, and I'm going to spend the next two years doing them. Some of the trips I desperately want to do are in the Top End and Centre.

How would you sum up your experiences?

It's been a wonderful 30 years and I hope that I'm still going in some form in another 10. Or if I can emulate the man who I learned about only from his obituary, maybe I can still be going in another 25. He was a mountain guide in Switzerland and he'd led his last trip as a guide at the age of 95. So that's something to aim for. **W**

A Wild Gambit

Author *John Blay* shares an account of one of the initial walks in the Brogo wilderness that led to the publication of his latest book

My gambit was intended to get us into wilderness. The wilder — not areas designed to deny the old Aboriginal Country, but rather those where it is most evident. Without the intrusion of roads and houses and highways and fences. Places owned by nobody, by everybody. The old lands. The wild country, where you experience that sense of the ancient Australia. I needed to open myself to it again. I was being called back yet again. A new project was building. But first we would test ourselves by going into the heart of the Brogo Wilderness.

The gambit was taken. As the first rays of sunlight struck the south of Wadbilliga National Park we walked past Mowitts Swamp, in the shadow of the turreted ramparts of Kydra, on our way to the great casuarina heathlands. These cover undulating country that looks surprisingly benign: grasslike from a distance. But it is snow heath, where snow lies for many weeks at a time, where it can snow at Christmas. It covers all manner of broken sandstone ridges and gaps. Monoliths and cliffs abound. Between peaks, ocean glimpses marked the far horizon to the east, between Bermagui and Tathra. Nowhere was there a sign of civilisation. The views down into Greens Hole, where the tablelands give way to the coastal forests in a sudden dark-bottomed amphitheatre, were still as spectacular as they were frightening. Jacqueline drew in her breath.

It was a scene of particular and savage beauty; one you'd see nowhere else. There is a special sensation to coming upon such unusual places, a kind of ecstasy. They evoke as great a range of emotions as art. Some have particular qualities that heighten the sensations. This location had it all, but it was a vision so rocky and dramatic it seemed to have no place for fragile human beings to move into the

frame. It looked as though it would be impossible for us to get down to the Brogo River. We took in the fine detail of the place, and I was able to point out the slender ridge that snaked its way downward into the depths and make our walk seem remotely possible. Then we had to start pushing our way around the rim of the Hole through the scrub and heath — often three metres high — to get there. 'Difficult' is not the right word for the way down to the river. Once we had found the ridge we had to clamber over and through enormous piles of trees blown across the exceedingly narrow razorback by mighty windstorms of recent years. I was able to show her the mythic lyrebird mounds that, on the ridge composed entirely of the upturned red shale and lacking soil of any kind, were built of pure stone. She witnessed the unique knobs along the ridge that sprout the rare and endangered *Eucalyptus stenostoma* in every direction, as though they were imitating huge pincushions. The sensation of walking along this red shale ridge, as thin as a rope stretched between the peaks, which drops off near vertically on either side, is incredibly exciting. At times you feel the hairs rising up the back of your neck. It's frightening but it's gorgeous. The views change from moment to moment.

At about 5pm we came to a place that the very latest in maps suggested would continue as a ridge, but reality presented as a gap with cliffs all about. Staring across the gulf was a Colditz Castle kind of formation with 80-metre ramparts of pure stone. That was the moment Jacqueline knew we shouldn't have undertaken a really tough walk. She would have gone back to Kydra if there were an alternative. It was most certainly an awful vision to come upon when you're near the end of an arduous day's walk and all you need is to sit down in a friendly campsite to think

about dinner. But she persisted, battling her way down cliffs and then through a kilometre of the sort of inhospitable scree and entangling vines you don't find along the ridgetops. At the creek we passed through a forest of tall, very peaceful Brogo wattles, *Acacia blayana*. One of the local plants that grow nowhere else.

We eventually came upon the river, in the middle of the great wilderness area, just after dark. When I say dark, I mean pitch black. But we made it. In the morning she sat beside the stream, looking down a very inhospitable reach. All you could properly see in the immediate vicinity was flood damage, the piles of debris and boulders, a terrible place insofar as the forces of nature are everywhere apparent. I could almost hear her thinking that 'we went through all that to see this.' When I joined her, she asked me, 'How come you love the Brogo so much?' She was definitely not enamoured.

'But I don't love it,' I told her quickly, perhaps too quickly. The tone of my reply sounded as if I was protesting too much. Maybe I was shocked by the thought that I might not love all of nature. Suddenly certain confusions were resolving themselves in my mind. I saw how, even with those people to whom you are closest, there are tracks you don't go down. Little aspects you never revisit; parts that are too foreign for you to actually reach in that person, difficulties that are, for the present, just too problematic to deal with. The wild is a great living thing to me, in the way of an old lover whose touch could still make me tremble. 'Some parts of the Brogo I do, certainly,' I said more slowly now. 'But other parts I'd never willingly go back into.' Perhaps my reactions to these totally natural places had such intensity because of inspiration, certain places can kick my brain up another gear or two. Later in the day we walked downriver to



Walking below Greens Hole Ridge
Photos: John Blay

the high pyramid formation and its moat, a place I remembered well from twenty years ago, finding to my great surprise it still had the power to take my breath away. It had concerned me that the exceptional places of so many years ago might now seem tame or ordinary. Perhaps the sensations I had felt then were momentary aberrations, derangements brought on by extremes of exertion or isolation or a mix of them both. Maybe I wasn't so surprised, after all, to find similar responses on later visits. But the doubt remains. Youthful enthusiasms do not necessarily persist. I worried that the fount of inspiration might have changed or gone. But it was still there: scary, strange, magnificent and everything I remembered. The image I had carried in my imagination was almost what I found this time. Somehow I had slightly diminished the impressions, but only slightly enough so that it could once more leave me speechless and amazed. After revisiting other parts I had described twenty years ago I found they could still trigger similar sensations. I had also been surprised to realise how, in general, little has changed all through the great tract of wild country. It is today virtually as it was then. Along this river, as with most of the bigger streams of the

region, there has, however, been substantial growth of small trees — river peppermints and river casuarinas — on the straighter reaches. The thickets comprise many thousands of young trees currently no thicker than my forearm. They filled the flats and ancient campsites that had once been clear. Which means there have been no bushfires in the meantime. Twenty years is not a long time for this country, given its greater cycles of flood and drought.

Close to the end of our Brogo walk, after a few days of the easier delights along the river, Jacqueline admitted she had come to adore its pools and excitement, discovering its quickness, where moods change constantly as it tumbles from one reach to the next. We walked back up a different, steeper but more direct ridge to the top of the Great Divide beside Kydra, only to have the clouds come down. The heath was shrouded in a thickening, eerie mist. Slowly a wind gathered. The



Styphelia pallioclade in Wadbilliga NP




The mountain banksia (Banksia capra) as seen at Mowitts Swamp

She gave me a withering look. I could feel the vehemence that was to come before she opened her mouth. 'I am not a...' she paused before spitting out the last word. 'Wallaby!'



Walking at this altitude requires you to be prepared for extremely cold, wet conditions



temperature dropped. I didn't realise how cold it was getting. When Jacqueline had to stop to put on her jacket the coldness got to her. She was feeling tired again and she was slowing down. Without it seeming to rain, everything was absolutely drenched. The water was running down my neck and squelching in my boots. I had to spend a lot of time waiting for her and encouraging her on and choosing the best way through the heath, which varied in height from one to three metres. It can be a terrible fight to get through where the countless small branches are laced together. At best, you are lifting one leg as high as it will go and then the other, pushing and twisting all the time to break through, dodging and weaving and so forth. At times I would hear the cry from behind, 'Don't get too far ahead. I can't see you.' In that mist, if we became separated we might not find each other again.

A strange psychological thing happens sometimes on occasions like this. Typically people who find themselves under unusual or extreme stresses will unwittingly turn upon their leader with an extraordinary anger. It wells up volcanically. After fury is expressed things can return to normal.

And so it was that Jacqueline was becoming angry with me. I sensed it coming.

The easiest way through the casuarina heath, or *Allocasuarina nana* as the scientists would have it, is by the wallaby trails that wind this way and that. Just finding the best ways to make passage is a laborious process in the best of times and weather. At one point while navigating a circuitous route that was actually much easier, I looked back to see Jacqueline attempting to plough directly towards me in an attempted shortcut. She was stuck like a moth in a spider-web of interlaced heath branches.

'No, no,' I called to her. 'Go back, and come round the other way. Keep on the wallaby trail!'

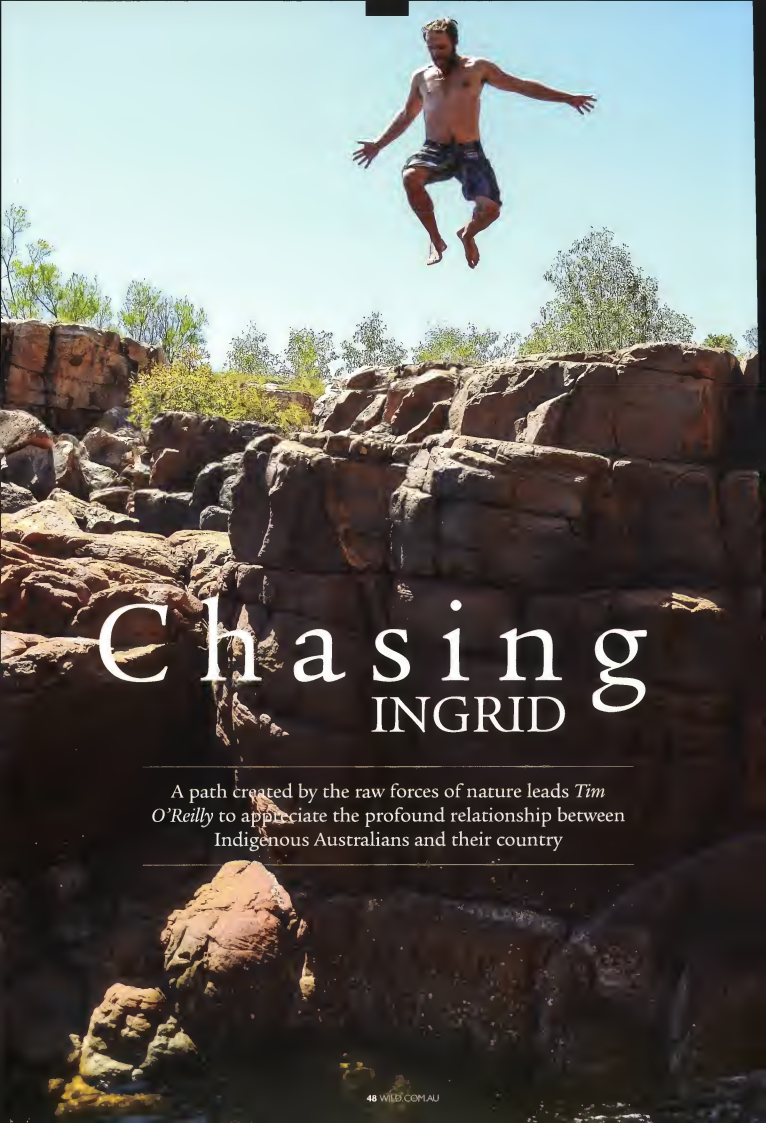
She gave me a withering look. I could feel the vehemence that was to come before she had opened her mouth. 'I am not a ...' she paused before spitting out the last word. 'Wallaby!' It came with a force that would have melted steel plate.

On top, the weather became colder. We couldn't see more than a metre ahead. We were drenched and freezing. When at last,

miraculously, I found a reasonably flat spot, exactly clear and big enough to fit our tent, we called a halt. The tent was up quickly enough and then we raised our body heat more slowly than we would have preferred in the sleeping bags. The emergency stash of muesli bars more than justified its transport all the way down and then most of the way back.

As we very slowly picked our way out early the next morning, we followed the twists and turns of the topography. The persistent mists cut visibility to a few metres but highlighted things that were close-by, intensified them, especially the wildflower flashes of colour that punctuated the softened green beauty of the heathland. Maybe the sensations were magnified by the dangers. Very generally we kept note of a GPS bearing through the white-out conditions. That's wilderness for you, we decided, always unpredictable. By the time we arrived back at the fire trail we knew it was all worthwhile. Neither of us were wallabies. The gambit had worked somehow. We had made the decision to head off on new explorations, to the other wild places between the coast and Kosciuszko. W

In 1982 John Blay received the first Parks Writers Award, allowing him to spend twelve months alone in the wilderness and write about his experiences. A book, *Back Country*, was the result. In 2003, roughly 20 years after his extended time in the Deua and Brogo wilderness areas, Blay decided to embark on even more exhaustive expeditions into the wilds. But the decision was not his alone. His partner Jacqueline also had to be convinced the venture was worthwhile and feasible. Why not take a short walk into the deepest Brogo together to clear any doubts? This is an account of the walk, which would eventually culminate in his recently published book *On Track: Searching out the Bundian Way*. Read our review of his book on page 72.



Chasing INGRID

A path created by the raw forces of nature leads *Tim O'Reilly* to appreciate the profound relationship between Indigenous Australians and their country



*The author cools off in the Berkeley River -
after carefully checking for crocodiles first.*
Photos: Tim O'Reilly



The idea of a singular weather event having a mythology and spiritual premise all of its own was a foreign concept to a white country kid growing up on a cattle property. However, eventually coming to live among the Ngarinyin and Wunambal Gaambera Aboriginal people of the central and northwestern Kimberley changed my perception of these things completely.

The desire to travel and head bush as a tour guide in the Kimberley, Arnhem Land and Cape York opened up new opportunities to understand our broad and culturally-extravagant landscape. Caught in a half-understood conversation by the flickering embers of a Kimberley campfire, it was the story of rain, storm and cyclone creator spirits known as 'Wanjina' that sparked an interest in that element of indigenous culture from that day forth.

The story seemed more sung than spoken, with the land created and cleansed by cyclones and storms. The Wanjina 'Gulingi' and rainbow serpent 'Wunggurr' shaped the earth, rivers and sea, leaving man as custodians to keep things vibrant.

The story of the Wanjina stirred a burgeoning idea within me, but it was only sometime later, while traipsing a lonely road on the Mitchell Plateau, that a feeling of exuberance came over me. The epiphany struck with a shiver of adrenaline as a flock of brolgas simultaneously passed overhead. I knew then that it was my calling to seek out as many pristine and remote locations as is possible in a lifetime and learn from the traditional custodians of those lands. To learn the secrets bound within country and culture and how they might transform each of us. Yet it wasn't until Cyclone Ingrid

swirled and smashed its way across the northern Australian coastline in March 2005 that my hopes of traversing the remote sections of Australia's far north became anything more than haphazard. Sometimes a guiding star is required to motivate a true journey.

I marvelled at the idea that Australia would once have been so interconnected between the silent and powerful minds of Aboriginal elders that a type of songline or calling might be created for a storm. A journey or a path whispered on the wind as it were to bring devastation, renewal and life to such a vast area as that crossed by Cyclone Ingrid.

Ingrid is the only tropical storm in recorded history to hit Cape York, Arnhem Land, the Top End and Kimberley Coasts, all as a severe Tropical Cyclone (category 4 or 5). Cutting a random, and in places



Young Wik and Kugu kids from Aurukun love the wet season



Graceful Gwion images have been dancing in Kimberley caves for millennia

devastating, trail across the far north, Ingrid brought turmoil to both the marine and terrestrial environments. Lives lost from the storm were recorded in the Gulf of Papua with a vessel overturned in large swells. Fortunately nobody died in Australia.

CARVING A PATH

Research for the journey began aboard a charter boat on the Archer River in Aurukun, on the west coast of Cape York. It was my job to ensure no harm befell the community-owned charter vessel. Feasting on the mud crabs that funnelled past my boat in the narrowest of mozzie-infested creeks, it had been an uneventful few days. The worst of the storm had splintered thought the Great Barrier Reef, before dissipating well before it reached the west coast of Cape York. However, the all-

encompassing gloominess of the weather system indicated it had plenty more to go. Imagine an eagle-eye view of Cape York's river-dissected interior, Arnhem Land's white sandy shores and the breathtakingly stark and beautiful gorge country of the Kimberley. Add to this the destruction of Cyclone Ingrid as she ripped her way past Night Island and through the hills and narrow valleys on the eastern slopes of the McIlwraith Range. A narrow path of demolition like fingers or a web with small pockets of devastation wrought mostly on remote landscape. The area where Ingrid struck Cape York is spectacular, from the huge inshore coral reefs of Princess Charlotte Bay, into the rugged, jungle clad mountains lining the coast. This is nature at its breathtaking best. Given the health of the reef and jungles,

perhaps one of the most biologically diverse locations on the planet. 1,500 species of fish swimming next to well over a thousand species of plants produces an interconnected cavalcade of life. The tributaries of Archer and Wenlock Rivers swelled to bursting point by the torrential rains unleashed by Cyclone Ingrid. Tiny rivulets beginning near the east coast to join a mighty river flowing out the west coast. This event fed the enormous wetlands and river systems of Cape York's west coast and the place teemed with life as a result. Then it was like Ingrid caught her breath crossing the land, because she exited on the opposite coast just a whisper of the beast she once was. Breathing in again over the vast shallow expanse of the warm Gulf of Carpentaria waters, the storm grew once

more to a Category 5. This time the remote surrounding communities and township of Nhulunbuy got full force as it stirred up the sands that make this stretch of northeast Arnhem Land so stunning. White silica granules and shell grit beaches border the islands that proliferate along this stretch of coast. Across the English Company and Wessel Islands, the cyclone made a beeline for Cobourg Peninsula and the Tiwi Islands. Widespread destruction of vegetation and infrastructure occurred wherever she touched land.

From here the cyclone crossed north of Darwin and gathered momentum once again in the huge bowl of Joseph Bonaparte Gulf. She tracked south into Wanjinia country of the far northern Kimberley. Timeless sandstone escarpment country, filled with the echoes and rock art of an ancient culture.

The caretakers of the tourist camp Faraway Bay learned of the cyclone's ferocity and took shelter in a concrete-reinforced shipping container. They emerged the next

day to survey the utter devastation and to try and work out how boats had become lodged hundreds of metres inland. Switching direction southeast and back overland, Cyclone Ingrid made a last ditch bid for Lake Argyle, running out of breath in some huge downpours. Filling those thirsty Kimberley billabongs with the precious nutrients needed to sustain life. Emma Gorge in the Cockburn Ranges copped a deluge so swift and absolute that a funnel of rain poured through the gorge, wrecking all in its path. This included trees, infrastructure and buildings. Floodwaters dispersed over the silty basin of the lower Ord River, feeding endless food chains. Good preparation and a bit of luck kept most people out of harm's way. The plants and animals did the best they could under hectic conditions and each that survived its brute force were stronger and healthier for having done so.

FOOTPRINTS OF A CYCLONE

At the outset, retracing the path of the cyclone seemed like a novel and achievable idea, but as the vastness of this rugged coastline and demoralising interior dawned upon me over subsequent years, a single-minded mission has turned into a lifetime's work.

Just as Cyclone Ingrid flew predominately over ocean, gulf and sea, much of my journey has been undertaken by boat, where I have been lucky enough to guide clients around the Torres Strait, Cape York, Arnhem Land and the Kimberley. I have learnt over this time that wealth is not always born in prosperity. The richness in the lives I have seen is born through country, connection, the stories, ancestry,

language, kinship and – above all – an understanding of what it means to be the true traditional custodians of this land. Any ideas I had about land ownership, about land rights and about what it means to be an indigenous person living in Australia would be fundamentally tested over the following years. I would learn to try more listening, less speaking, more appreciation rather than judgment. I began to desire an acceptance into country. Throughout the journey I came to feel at ease sitting silent around a campfire, listening intently to a language and stories I could hardly understand.

Years later I revisited those people of the Kimberley, still invigorated by the journey which had begun so many miles and moons ago. A knowing nod and wry smile was the best summary of an event that had now become shrouded in the dreaming and minds of the people.

What came from this search is the most humbling and heartwarming hospitality I have experienced in my lifetime. An eclectic mix of characters residing in the far north of Australia, ready to combat the elements and lend a helping hand to anyone who takes a genuine interest in their lives. I personally discovered that, rather than being the shy and secretive people we see portrayed so often, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are perhaps the most fun loving of any I've met – ready with a quick wit and a wry smile. But perhaps more importantly is the incredibly deep connection they have with their country. My own experience on the land has certainly deepened my appreciation for that sacred relationship. [W](#)



Wanjinia – creator beings are responsible for floods, lightning and cyclones



A lonesome boab tree on an East Kimberley plain



The wetlands on Cape York's west coast require a deluge to create life in abundance

CONQUER NEW TERRITORY

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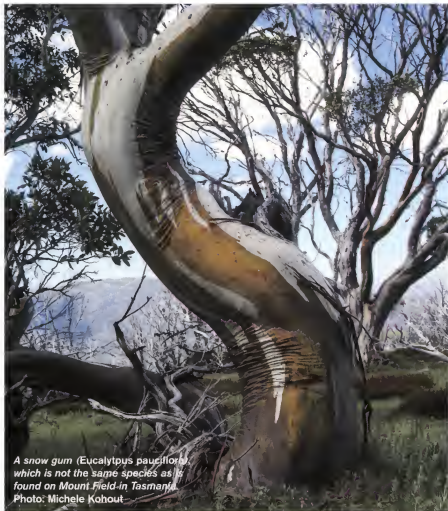
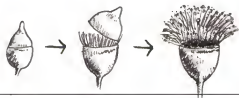
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SUUNTO



By Gum

For her debut column, botanist and veteran *Wild* contributor **Michele Kohout** presents a meditation on the humble eucalypt



A snow gum (*Eucalyptus pauciflora*), which is not the same species as the found on Mount Field in Tasmania. Photo: Michele Kohout

It is a perfect place to rest after meandering all day along brooding billabongs. I sit, leaning against a majestic old river red gum on the banks of the Murray River. I look up into the spreading branches of the tree to watch a screeching sulphur-crested cockatoo and inhale that eucalypt scent so typical of the Australian bush. I contemplate how many different people and generations might have sat under this tree, for it is well over 200 years old. I think about the varied landscapes of this country and, above all, I think about the plants that both define them and are defined by them.

Eucalypts are perhaps our most

recognisable, distinctive and common of Australian trees, dominating an impressive 75 per cent of our native forests. Who can resist picking a leaf and crushing it to inhale the aroma? The smell of a eucalypt forest is especially noticeable on a warm day or after rain due to the volatile oils (terpenes) in the leaves. These oils create a blueish haze over summer-baked forests, and led to the naming of the Blue Mountains. The oils protect the eucalypt leaves, especially the young leaves, from insect attack. Eucalypt leaves are shed continuously, though each leaf may live for a few years, and the oils remain in the tough leathery leaves leading to long and slow decomposition. This, in turn, has

implications for nutrient cycling and can determine which plants are able to grow in the understorey, thus shaping the types of forests, woodlands and shrublands we see on our forays into the bush.

The animals that form associations with gum trees are also unique. The koala is a specialised herbivore that has a diet composed exclusively of gum leaves. Gum leaves are very fibrous and low in nutrients and protein. This means that digestion is long and slow in a specialised gut with a large bacteria-filled chamber (the caecum). The low amount of energy extracted means that koalas are not the most energetic of animals – they are inactive for 20 hours out of 24! It is little wonder that they are most often seen dozing in the fork of a gum tree.

Other animals use gum trees as habitat. Victoria's faunal emblem, the critically endangered leadbeaters possum, relies on hollows in old growth eucalypt forests dominated by mountain ash. There has been a decline in the numbers of the possum due to a decrease in old trees with hollows, likely caused by repeated fires and harvesting of timber. It can take over 100 years for these trees to become old enough to form hollows, but this is too slow for the possum and scientists have been successfully carving artificial hollows in living trees. Birds also use the hollows as nest sites – as the children's song says: 'kookaburra sits in the old gum tree'. Australia is the land of parrots for good reason: the abundance of nest holes and nectar from eucalypt flowers.

Perhaps we take eucalypts for granted because they are everywhere. Yet delving into the detail of their distribution we find that, while some are able to survive in a range of climates, soils and geologies and are widespread (e.g.: the river red gum), others are only found in small, localised areas. To see a Mount Imlay Gum, one would have to climb the steep three-kilometre track up Mount Imlay in southeast NSW. The Suggan Buggan mallee can only be seen in the river gorges of the Snowy River. Eucalypts can define or explain an Australian landscape. Walking through low twisted snow gums, I am on a mountain along the Australian Alps

walking track. Looking up into tall karri, I am on the Bibbulman Track. These trees are also defined by the landscape and the environment. Mountain ash, the world's tallest flowering plant (growing to an average height of 85 metres), can only exist in areas of high rainfall and deep fertile soil, such as Sherbrooke Forest on the outskirts of Melbourne.

The name *eucalyptus* comes from the Greek 'eukalyptos' meaning well concealed, referring to the cap that covers the flower before it opens. They may all look the same, but the subtle differences in bark type and colour, bud, fruit and leaf shape make them unique and up to 700 different species have been recognised. The fruit, in particular, are varied in shape and size and can be used to identify different species, sometimes very easily.

We botanists use latin or scientific names, consisting of two names – a genus and species name – to label different plants. The names themselves can be fascinating. Sometimes the species name tells us about features of the plant, for example *Eucalyptus citriodora*, means lemon-scented. Or they may be named after a person, such as Victoria's first government botanist Baron Ferdinand von Mueller in *Eucalyptus muelleriana*. Other species are named after localities, such as *Eucalyptus croajingalensis*.

Gums also have common names, such as woollybutt, scribbly gum, snow gum, and swamp gum. These names, while being wonderfully descriptive, aren't so useful to the scientist because the same plant can have a variety of names depending on the locality. In my favourite stomping ground of Kosciuszko, the snow gum found there is *Eucalyptus pauciflora* (the name being somewhat of a misnomer in this case since it is anything but lacking in flowers!) but on a circuit of Tarn Shelf, Mount Field in Tasmania, I will be also seeing snow gums, but a quite different species: *Eucalyptus occifera*. Perhaps the detail of scientific names is a bit nerdy, but it means we all know what we are referring to, as each plant species can only have one name.

As I walk in the bush I can't help but put names to the living things around me. It helps me to understand or connect to the landscape; it can be thought provoking. I wonder why certain types of eucalypt are found where they are. I think about that size is not necessarily an indication of age, since small, stunted trees on ridgelines may be much older than those in the valley. Knowing about the ecology of eucalypts can help me orientate myself in the landscape; snow gums aren't found in subalpine valleys where cold air collects at night, thereby indicating a poor choice of campsite.

Indigenous plant names are less well

understood or documented, and vary depending on the local indigenous group. The river red gum is known as Pee al, Ta'art or Be-al by the South Australian Bandungitj group. The messmate is Wangnarra. Sometimes the English common name is the indigenous name: *Eucalyptus brachycalyx* or Gilja. Some have two common names, one of them indigenous, such as *Eucalyptus coscinotricha* – Yertchuk or prickly stringybark. It would be nice if this dual naming of the common name were more prevalent. It is interesting that different cultures feel it is important to call each thing by its 'right' name.

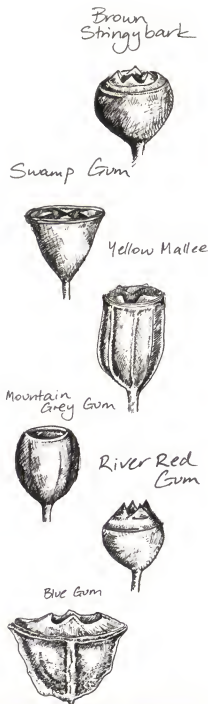
Eucalypts feature prominently in art and culture, in a diversity of media and forms. They have inspired storytellers from the numerous stories of the Dreaming to May Gibbs' charming *Snugglypot and Cuddlegie*, poets like Banjo Patterson (*The Man from Ironbark*) and countless artists. Indigenous artist Albert Namatjira's paintings are so distinctive not only because he captured the vivid colours and spectacular geology of our arid interior, but also the beautiful yet stark white ghost gums.

Gum trees are an important resource for generations of Australia's first people. Food vessels (coolamons) can be made from burls and bark, intricate dilly bags woven from string made from bark. Species with very hard wood (like the Victorian ironbark, *Eucalyptus tricarpa*) are used to make tools and weapons. Branches, leaves and bark are used for making shelter. Some species particularly lend themselves to the making of didgeridoos and clapsticks. The bark used for paintings is cut from the stringybark (*Eucalyptus tetradonta*) in the wet season when it is most pliable. Eucalypts are also a veritable outdoor pantry. Gum from many species can be used as an adhesive, a lolly or toothache remedy. Nectar can be obtained from the flowers. Small sap-sucking insects, lerps (itself a Koori name) live on the leaves of some species, and the covers the animal constructs to protect itself are a sweet, sugary snack. Larger food animals, like goannas, possums, birds, use gums as habitat.

Eucalypts have a rather volatile (pun intended) relationship with fire. The oils in the leaves make them highly flammable. The flaming long, ribbony bark of some species can be carried by wind to propagate new fire fronts. They promote fire since their seedlings thrive in open conditions where there is no competition from other plants. Smoke and ash have been found to stimulate germination of the seeds in a number of species. Many eucalypt species are able to regenerate after fire from buds in the trunk, which are protected by thick bark, or from a basal swelling called a lignotuber. The incredible speed with which the bush becomes green and regenerates after a fire, is

in part, due to the tenacity of the eucalypt.

There is a wealth of nature around us every time we heft a pack and set off into the wilderness. Although we have seen species decline and habitat loss, there is still a lot to explore and observe, for this generation and those to come. There are wide vistas to absorb and admire in the far distance, and individual trees and plants, around us, to contemplate and observe. I cannot help but be inspired by the beautiful detail in the natural world around us, and to treasure and try to understand it. **W**



Michele Kohoul's new column, Wilderness [Re] generation, is named after her article appearing in Wild 98, and will provide readers with added details regarding Australia's places and plantlife.



Welcome to Base Camp

Joe Bonington introduces himself and his mission to prepare all adventurers for their next expedition

Training at Joe's Basecamp Gym. Photos: Supplied



I'm Joe Bonington, owner of Joe's Basecamp Gym on Sydney's Northern Beaches – a centre that specialises in training people for adventure sports. My background is that of a strength and conditioning coach, an outdoorsman and a trek leader, having led treks in various parts of Nepal and Bhutan.

My intention for this column is to provide a series of articles that deal with the best ways to train and prepare for a variety of adventures, regardless of your prior training, current fitness or age. Allow me to begin, however, by explaining a little more about who I am.

For the 16 years that I've been a strength and fitness coach, I've spent at least as much time in the gym as I have 'out there' in the wilderness. Unlike many other adventurers, I actually really enjoy the training aspect of what I do, because I believe that what I can achieve at the gym will yield rewards when I'm in the field.

No doubt my passion for wilderness adventure can be attributed to my upbringing. I grew up in the lake district in the UK, Britain's biggest national park and the home of fell running (a specific type of trail running) as well as some of Britain's best rock climbing. My father, Sir Chris

Bonington, is generally considered one of the world's eminent mountaineers, and while I've not quite followed in his footsteps to become a highly technical ice climber or high-altitude mountaineer, I still dabbled in these activities and fell in love with the wild places on earth, the distant cultures and nature in general. As a result, I have been lucky enough to complete my own Himalayan first ascent and stand on top of an unclimbed – albeit small – peak.

My love of the mountains and wild places has directed me to organise and lead commercial treks through various parts of Nepal and Bhutan. But now that I've made Australia my home, I've also been lucky enough to spend a lot of time on our own doorstep, undertaking outdoor projects for television in the Cockburn Ranges of the Northern Territory, and taking marginalised kids across the Kokoda.

Approaching my own half-century (I'm currently 48), I find myself spending more time on helping others to prepare their minds and bodies for the trials they will face in seeking their own adventures. In the modern world, this preparation entails the application of much effort at the gym.

However, this wasn't always the case.

Back in the '60s and '70s, when Dad and

his compatriots were preparing for their big expeditions on Everest or Annapurna, training consisted of rock climbing weekends in Wales. Because it was Wales, these trips often ended with the climbers spending as much time tucked up in a pub, having been rained off, than they spent climbing. Any fitness was attained on the approach to the climb, and many of them smoked as well.

This paradigm didn't really change until the '80s. In the states, the legendary alpinist Mark Twight (at the start of his career), realised that strength training could help with his performance. He didn't know what to do, so he just began doing what everybody else in the gym was doing. In an era of Stallone and Schwarzenegger, this meant doing exercise designed to add muscle mass, with very little concern for endurance. Twight soon realised that the routines he was doing wouldn't help him as the very nature of alpinism means you want no excess weight; as high a strength-to-bodyweight ratio as possible and a lot (and I mean a lot) of stamina. Twight would go on to be twice nominated for mountaineering's Piolet D'or award, and inspired other top-level alpinists such as Steve House.

Throughout the '80s and '90s, strength training and conditioning for outdoor sports – from mountaineering to trail running – was still restricted for full-time athletes. Perhaps some of the more serious climbers had started conditioning with campus boards and other drills by then, but that was about it. As for your general public, well, the weekend trail runners ran, the trekkers trekked and the recreational climbers climbed. The majority of gyms were designed as health centres with lots of cardio equipment and geared towards weight loss.

Then the internet arrived and changed our world. All of a sudden we had instant access to all kinds of information. We heard about new places to explore; we also got to read and see the secrets of the professionals, the people who inspire us, the people we want to emulate. Many now dreamed of climbing and exploring in places that would have been unheard of when Dad started out. As a

result, demand for personal training exploded alongside specialist gym facilities. People became aware of exercises that improve explosive power; they began including barefoot running in their training schedule, or dragging barrels and ropes. It was at this time that gyms started building climbing walls.

Over the last 30 years, our understanding of the science behind strength and conditioning has greatly advanced. Athletes of all disciplines have benefited from targeted strength and conditioning plans and the adventure sports are no different.

As our expendable income increases, access to wild and high places has improved and this has caused many people to seek out adventures that are higher, longer, faster and more remote.

It's this combination of events, more access, more money and more info that have compounded our ability and need to train for adventure. The only problem is that now there is too much conflicting information available. In going online, you now have facts and advice coming from all sides, and this information can often be inappropriate or downright misleading. In today's world of blogs and online marketing, any personal trainer can set themselves up as a specialist alpine trainer even though they may have only visited Everest Basecamp once.

What I hope that this column provides is a way for you to cut through all this noise. As someone who is registered with the Australian Strength and Conditioning Association (among other qualifications), and who has actually spent a serious amount of time 'out there', I hope to help you to do the things you love most, to maximise your enjoyment in those things and to minimise your risk of injury while doing them.

I subscribe to the belief that, in everything in life, it's not the destination but the journey that's most important. But it's also in undertaking the journey that one's mettle is tested. Let me show you how to make that journey a memorable and satisfying process, even if it leads to areas previously unexplored. **W**



Joe with his father, Sir Chris Bonington

The Prusik: Small, yet so useful

Forget all the expensive climbing trinkets says Stuart Matheson from Adventure Training Consultants, the trusty Prusik is essential to include on any climb

There is no shortage of shiny trinkets that climbers can hang off our harnesses.

You can literally spend hundreds, or even thousands (for those with a professional income) of dollars on gear designed to keep you safe when scaling whichever route has made it onto the latest tick list.

Despite all of this expensive gear and highly engineered modern equipment, the one item that you will notice is always carried by professional instructors and guides – as well as many serious climbers – is the humble Prusik. This unassuming loop of cord that can be created for just a few dollars and is barely visible amongst the spring-loaded camming devices (or SLCs), spectra slings, and latest karabiners that are racked on the lead climber's harness. The Prusik is still the "go to" bit of kit required to solve most vertical rescue situations. With a couple of Prusik cords and a bit of knowledge, almost any climbing-related rescue system can be built, but without them things get a lot harder.

The person we have to thank for such a versatile and inexpensive piece of equipment is Dr Karl Prusik (1896 to 1961), he was an Austrian mountaineer with many achievements, but it would seem he will always be best known for the very useful knot that he developed.

Actually a hitch (as it has to be tied around something), its widespread use has seen the eponymous Prusik applied to describe the loops of cord (Prusik loops), other similar hitches (French Prusik, also known as the Autoblock, Kleimhest and Bachman) and even the action of its use ("I Prusiked up a rope"). As a result, the term Prusik itself has become somewhat vague, to the point that the hitch itself is now widely referred to as the 'Classic Prusik'.

HOW IT WORKS

Essentially, the loop of cord is wrapped around the rope and either threaded back through itself or the ends are attached together in order to secure it (refer to photographs), the number of times it is wrapped around the rope depends on the

amount of friction required and the difference in diameter of the rope versus the cord. Once it has been wrapped around in the appropriate manner the Prusik will grip the rope tightly. This can then facilitate a number of techniques such as ascending ropes, creating hoist systems, backing up abseils, lowering and more. The ability to use the Prusik in numerous different ways, with single or double ropes, means that it remains superior to modern mechanical equivalents in many cases.

Prusik-style hitches have been successfully used for over 80 years. They have enabled the first ascents of mountains, helped climbers to rescue themselves, assisted rescue teams in saving lives and have even been put to use by arborists and ropes-access professionals. While in some situations they have been superseded by modern systems, their versatility, small size and light weight means that they will continue to be an integral element for climbing and mountaineering activities for some time to come.

If you don't already have some, get to your local climbing store, splash out on some six or seven millimetre (appropriately rated) accessory cord and make yourself some of the most useful pieces of equipment that you'll have on your harness. **W**



Classic Prusik



Kleimhest

French Prusik

Bush tucker

Studying the culinary practices of Australia's indigenous people reveals a combination of nutrition, flavour and efficiency, writes *Andrew Davison*

The way indigenous people of northern Australia go about harvesting and preparing their bush tucker. For instance, when hunting mud crabs a fire is made in the shade of a tree, then with a stick in hand for defence from the formidable claws, a foray is made through ankle deep mud. After an hour or so a cloth bag full of crabs is returned to the fire, which has receded to a bed of coals ready for cooking. Turtle are found by wandering the floodplains with a knowledgeable eye

while probing the soft earth with a stick. When a 'clunk' is heard, only a little digging is required – and there is dinner. File snake are sought with bare feet or hands in the shallows of the wetlands and then killed by placing the head of the docile snake in one's mouth while yanking the body to break its neck. However, catching bagramundi is now mostly done by hook, line and sinker. On the banks of a croc-infested billabong in western Arnhem Land I sat patiently with June – a traditional owner of the

country we fished on – and watched as she brought a 45-centimetre barra ashore, casting hand-over-hand as the line fell tangled at her feet. I was most interested in the cooking method. I noted that, among the rocks above the billabong, there were a few thickets of wild native lemongrass, and after cutting and bruising a few stems I put these in the cavity where the insides had been removed from the fish. In this case, common practice led to a delicious combination.



GROUND OVEN BAKED BARRA

This traditional method of roasting the fish is not only a common practise for fish, but for any meats from kangaroo to water buffalo. If walking in northern Australia with a fishing line, this method of baking your catch will produce the most succulent fish.

METHOD

In soft earth, preferably sand, dig a ditch approximately 30 centimetres deep and large enough to fit your fish. Make a fire in the ditch and stoke well, then add enough small, fist-sized stones to roughly cover the base of the ditch. Allow the fire to burn down and for the stones to absorb the heat. Meanwhile gut and scale the fish, (it is possible to leave the fish as is and peel the skin off once baked, being careful to

eat around the guts) and strip a large portion of paperbark from a nearby melaleuca tree.

When the fire is ready, push aside half of the stones. Place your fish on the remaining hot stones and place the other back over the fish. Cover with the sheet of paper bark and then cover with soil or sand.

Within 10 -15 minutes carefully uncover the fish and serve on a fresh piece of paper bark.

FIGS IN SPICED SYRUP

Serves 2

On the lowland banks of most large, northern Australian rivers can be found great masses of figs hanging from the trunks of the cluster fig tree. When red or orange the cluster figs are ripe and offer a nourishing snack while waiting for the fish to jump onto your line, but they also make a great sweet dessert. If foraging for cluster figs on your next walk is not possible, they can be replaced with supermarket-bought dried figs.

INGREDIENTS

8-10 figs (fresh or dried)
¼ cup of blanched almonds
5 cardamom pods bruised
4 cloves
Small piece of cinnamon quill
The zest of quarter of a lemon (optional)
2 dessert spoons of sugar

AT HOME

Stuff each fig with one or two of the almonds and pack into a bag with the spices. If using the lemon zest cut into thin strips and allow to dry on a tea towel for a few days and pack with the figs and spices. Pack the rest of the almonds and sugar separately.

IN THE FIELD

Place the figs and spices in a small pot, add a cup of water and bring to the boil and allow to simmer until the figs soften, approximately two or so minutes. Now add the sugar and almonds and allow to simmer for a further few minutes. Serve on its own or over instant custard or, for a more filling dessert, over a small amount of prepared couscous.



Andrew Davison takes pleasure in the simplicity of being in the bush. A world traveller and culinary connoisseur, he has become a regular *Wild* contributor.



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1 Skyline 10L pack \$179.95

The latest CamelBak pack (also available in a ladies' specific model), is designed to have a low center of gravity and thereby lends itself towards mountainbiking, but will suit as a daypack for some hikers. camelbak.com

2 Helium 300 Sleeping Bag \$499.95

Designed for the lightweight walker in mind, the Helium 300 is the lightest of 3 weights available in the range. Constructed with an ultralight shell and 800+ loft down, this bag weighs just 700g. mont.com.au

3 Storm and Stow Jacket \$300

Emergency weather protection on long runs, this seam-sealed, fully waterproof jacket is designed for minimum weight and maximum protection against the elements. thenorthface.com.au

4 Base Camp Citer \$200

Modeled on The North Face's Cinder climbing pack, this one has been designed with the urban adventurer in mind. Features a 15" laptop sleeve and padded back panel for comfort and support. thenorthface.com.au

5 Amicus Stove with Stealth igniter \$74.95

SOTO's high-performance, low-cost stove maintains its stability with 4-prong, spring-loaded pot supports and outputs well in windy conditions due to its unique burner design. Weighs just 81g without canister. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

6 Mistral GTX Hiking Boot 200 GII \$279.95

A comfortable hiking boot with all-terrain capabilities, Scarpa's new boot offers a Vibram Energy outsole and a Gore-Tex-lined, 1.8mm suede leather upper. outdooragencies.com.au

7 Coconut Chocolate Chip \$2.95

Made with 70% organic ingredients, the latest Clif Bar flavour is designed for adventurers on the go. High in carbohydrates, the bars also contain 11 vitamins and minerals. clifbar.com.au

8 Cuba 75L Travel Pack \$279.95

BlackWolf's new travel backpack and zip-off daypack combo is designed with adventurous travellers in mind. Includes inbuilt raincovers, mesh waterbottle pockets and are easily locked for peace of mind. blackwolf.com.au

9 Women's Pro-Elite Stormchaser Jacket \$449.95

The latest all-weather outerlayer garment from Mountain Designs features Gore-Tex Active 3: a 3-layer fabric that is fully wind and waterproof, but is also Gore-Tex's most breathable. mountaindesigns.com

10 All-Terrain Cycle from \$599

Trx Cycles have just launched a 7-speed, all-terrain bicycle that can be ridden over snow, sand and soil. Ideal for any adventurer hungry for a novel outdoor experience. trxcycles.com

11 Backcountry Pack \$549.95

Constructed with Infinity Corespun canvas, Cordura nylon and bar tacked at all stress points, this Mont pack comes in three sizes: 75L, 80L and 85L. mont.com.au

12 Taku Stretch Glove \$69.95

A tightly woven fleece glove from Outdoor Designs offers wind protection, minimal weight and strong mobility. The included silicon grip palm means dexterity need not be sacrificed for comfort. frontierequipment.com.au



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13 Aeros Premium Deluxe Pillow \$79.95

Sea to Summit's full-sized inflatable pillow is constructed with 50D quilted polyester for a soft feel and weighs just 196g, packing down to 12x10x5cm for easy transportation. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

14 Strata Multi-Plier with Sheath \$99.99

A slim, compact multitool from Gerber featuring a butterfly opening mechanism and 13 outboard components including a half-serrated knife, pliers, saw and 3 screwdrivers. au.gerbergear.com

15 Mountain Expedition Pack \$459

This pack from Wilderness Equipment offers enormous capacity with 95L and 100L options for adventurers taking on multi-week ski mountaineering expeditions and long approaches. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

16 e-LITE \$52

A compact, emergency headlamp from Petzl weighing in at 27g that can be stored up to 10 years with its batteries. Features integrated retractable cord and outputs at 26 lumens. speleat.com.au

17 Kimber Short Sleeved Polo \$49.95

Part of the new Polygiene range from Mountain Designs, these clothes include a silver ion treatment that aims to prohibit the bacterial growth that causes body odour. mountaindesigns.com

18 Ultra Kilowatt \$200

Minimal-structure mountain athlete running shoe with high-ventilation mesh for breathability, Vibram outsole and rubber toe cap for added protection. thenorthface.com.au

19 EvoWood 17 \$99.95

Part of the new 'Delémont Collection' from Victorinox, this Swiss army knife features a sustainably-sourced, walnut grip that houses a knife, woodsaw, scissors and much more. victorinox.com

20 G3 Devil Polarised \$289.95

Gloryf's unbreakable sunglasses have landed at Paddy Pallin. This model sports polarised lenses with an anti-fog coating that protects the wearer from UV rays up to 400nm. paddypallin.com.au

21 Barrel Travel Bag (L) \$209.00

An 85L, water-resistant solution for packing extra gear on your next paddling adventure, this Tatonka bag is made with heavy-duty materials and features multiple straps and handles for different carrying configurations. outdooragencies.com.au

22 Cosmo Head Torch \$64.95

A waterproof headtorch designed with mountain adventures in mind, the new Cosmo from Black Diamond now offers 180 lumens with 3 AAA batteries, as well as full variety of modes. seatosummitdistribution.com.au

23 Aerospace Goggle \$26.95

Julbo introduces a goggle that offers superior ventilation regardless of whether you're ascending or descending a mountain due to the unique way the lens hinges off the frame. mont.com.au

24 MA Graphic Reaxion Amp Crew \$45

A popular performance t-shirt, the 100% polyester-knit provides moisture wicking while still feeling soft to the touch. Part of The North Face's Mountain Athletics collection. thenorthface.com.au



TRIED AND TESTED

Practically a default item in any bushwalker's kit, Olivia Grover Johnson surveys some of the latest sunhats available on the Australian market

Like many people who head out into the wilderness at least a few times each year, I've come to rely heavily on a 'master packing list' that is designed to ensure I never miss any essential items for my journeys. One of those items that I consider to be absolutely critical is a good, broad-brimmed sunhat, and there aren't many situations in which it is overlooked. Particularly in Australia, where sunburn is a real threat even on many overcast days, it's advisable to have a hat that's effective at protecting not only the forehead and the top of the head, but also the entire face, ears and neck. Broad-brimmed hats and legionnaires hats generally afford this level of protection. It goes without saying that the short-term risk of bad sunburn is usually a distant secondary concern when compared with the long-term risk of skin cancer, and this is why choosing the right headwear is so important.

FUNCTION AND FORM

While the selection of products reviewed in this issue is skewed towards the broad-brimmed variety, we have included a few peaked caps to consider also. These are generally considered more useful for performance activities, such as trail running or rock climbing, but provide significantly less shade cover for the ears and back of the neck. It's worth noting that peaked caps are also superior in providing a nearly unimpeded field of vision, where some broad-brimmed hats can start to impinge on the peripherals.

As a result, we've roughly grouped the reviewed hats into the performance caps (Built for Speed), the most protective hats (High Grade Shade) and a few with special attributes that may suit niche requirements (A League of Their Own).

A further consideration for adventurers who undertake mountaineering, ski touring or water sports upon occasion, as all these activities leave the face exposed to being burned from reflected light coming from below. This is attributed to the reflective nature of water in a variety

of states, whether it is liquid, snow or ice. In this circumstance the liberal and regular application of sunscreen is the best defence, however we are aware of some styles of legionnaires hats that have a flap capable of wrapping right around the front of the neck (although none have been trialled in this review).

Finally, potential buyers should also pay close attention to a sunhat's ability to survive being packed. There are always situations – whether in transit, at night or otherwise – when you will need to stow your hat for later use. Some hat styles are simply not suited to this (think traditional broad-brimmed felt or leather hats such as Akubra or Stetson), and would quickly lose their shape and begin to degrade if they were stuffed into a pack even on just a few occasions.

NB: As you can see in the table below, some of these hats are available in multiple sizes, while others are designed to be one-size-fits-most. As a result, Wild advises that prospective buyers consider visiting a specialist outdoor retailer for a fitting prior to purchase.

Brand	Model	Sizes	Fabric	Style	Price
The North Face	Horizon	S/M and L/XL	100% Nylon ripstop	Peaked cap	\$30.00
	HyVent Hiker	S/M and L/XL	70D HyVent Nylon	Broad-brimmed	\$50.00
Mountain Designs	Legionnaires Convert Cap	One-size-fits-most	Polyester	Peaked cap/Legionnaires	\$24.45
Buff	Cap Pro	One-size-fits-most	Microfibre polyester	Peaked cap	\$49.95
Sunday Afternoons	Adventure	S, M and L	100% Nylon, Polyester mesh	Broad-brimmed/Legionnaires	\$49.95
	Compass	M and L	100% Nylon	Broad-brimmed	\$54.95
	Cruiser	M and L	100% Nylon, Polyester mesh	Narrow-brimmed	\$45.95
	Highlander	M and L	100% Nylon, Polyester mesh	Broad-brimmed	\$65.95
	Solar	M and L	100% Nylon, Polyester mesh	Bucket	\$39.95
Tilley	Quest	One-size-fits-most	100% Polyester	Broad-brimmed (Ladies only)	\$48.95
	T4 Cotton Duck	Multiple	Cotton duck	Broad-brimmed	\$139.95
	LTM6 Airflo	Multiple	100% Nylon, Polyester mesh	Broad-brimmed	\$145
	T055 Orbit	Multiple	78% Cotton, 22% Hemp	Broad-brimmed	\$155

BUILT FOR SPEED

The North Face

1. Horizon

A standard, peaked cap bearing The Northface Logo on the front. However, as the logo is rendered in a slightly lighter colour than the cap, it isn't too much of a statement. The manufacturer claims a UPF value of 50, so that it should protect from sunlight well, except for those areas that remain exposed. The inclusion of a soft mesh sweatband increased the comfort of the piece, while the adjustable clip closure means you should be able to find your ideal fit. Be warned; there are two sizes so consider fit foremost. After that, there are also multiple colours available to suit your taste.

Buff

2. Cap Pro

The polyester material used for this hat is the same used for other Buff products, which is designed to be moisture wicking. While we didn't have the chance to trial this over a period of months to see how the synthetic holds up over multiple wears, for now the hat keeps the head cool and hasn't taken on any bad odour. Its reversible design is a point of interest but it doesn't seem to contribute to the hat's functionality in any meaningful way. The most important functional note is that this hat's peak is around half as long as the other caps we've trialled. In this sense it presents as being best suited for cyclists, to be worn under a helmet. It weighs just 36 grams.

Mountain Designs

3. Legionnaires Convert Cap

We were wearing this hat for a few days before we realised it turns into a legionnaires-style hat. The long neck flap is concealed within a zippered compartment on the hat itself, and when folded down carefully it doesn't impact the profile of the hat in any way. Be careful how you do have it tucked away however, as any creases could make the hat annoying to wear. The velcro strap makes it easy to adjust the fit, however our experience is that these can wear quite quickly in heavy-use scenarios. Overall this is a great concept and a twist on the old-style legionnaires hats, and as the least expensive option on our list it's certainly worth taking a second look.

HIGH GRADE SHADE

The North Face

4. HyVent Hiker

This broad-brimmed option from The North Face is everything its peaked cousin isn't. The manufacturer claims it is both waterproof and breathable, which is attributed to the HyVent material used. It certainly seems to be breathable enough over several days' wear, however that has no bearing on how the material will respond to washing over an extended period. The sides of the brim can be pinned up to the crown with velcro tabs, while the chinstrap cord ensure it will stay on the head. The UPF 50 rating also gives confidence that my entire head would be protected throughout the day. The North Face has also included a soft terry sweatband and the seams are all taped to

ensure comfort. There's nothing worse than an irritated scalp, after all.

Tilley

5. T4 Cotton Duck

The Tilley Hat is a popular Canadian brand, and it's easy enough to see why. The 'cotton duck' material feels very much like a heavy-duty canvas, giving this broad-brimmed hat a very durable feel. The material is also designed to float, and this will make it more attractive for paddlers. Unfortunately, the nature of the fabric also makes it feel heavier, which may be a concern for those concerned with minimising weight. The wide, down-sloping brim ensures maximum shade. The UPF 50+ rating goes further to ease concerns. Our review model included an owners' manual hidden within the hat's secret pocket in the crown, which explains the lifetime guarantee and the fact that the hat is machine washable and won't shrink.

6. LTM6 Airflo

We found this to be very similar in design to the Cotton Duck model, however the Airflo synthetic feels a lot lighter and appears to offer more ventilation – an important consideration when you spend a lot of time bushwalking or paddling in Australia. Like its counterparts, it too sports a lifetime guarantee, will float in water and is supposed to repel rain. The lightweight synthetic means this hat is also perhaps a touch easier to pack and carry. In windy conditions, the chinstraps are designed to keep this hat firmly atop your scone, and that has to be a consideration for any hat with a full brim.



7. T055 Orbit

The most expensive of the options from Tilley, the manufacturer claims this model is constructed with organic cotton and hemp, thereby making it more similar to the Cotton Duck model as far as many of its attributes are concerned. One obvious point of difference is that this one has what is described as a medium down-sloping brim, which means it may not keep as much of you in the shade as you'd like. That being said, the hat has all the other attributes that makes this brand so popular and it is therefore worth considering for the dedicated adventurer.

Sunday Afternoons

8. Compass

The Compass is a relatively conventional broad-brimmed style from the innovative Sunday Afternoons brand. However, the 'convertible crown venting' system does offer a new way to allow additional airflow to the scalp and the stiffer brim will be preferred by some wearers. Overall it remains a very lightweight option at just 113 grams and maintains a more traditional look, which will appeal to those who are concerned with aesthetics in their outdoor apparel.

9. Highlander

Not the broadest brim of the hats we've trialled, but certainly the most similar of Sunday Afternoons' models in terms of appearing like a standard broad-brimmed hat. However, with additional mesh on the crown (UPF 40+), it feels like the most cooling of all the hats we've trialled from this brand. The faux-leather chinstrap and

cord lock adds to the traditional feel, but weighing in at just 120 grams, there's no doubt this hat is designed with modern adventurers in mind.

A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN

Sunday Afternoons

10. Adventure

This is the hat that has made Sunday Afternoons a household name among organisations like the Cancer Council, who have recognised its heightened ability to protect against sunburn with an extra-wide brim that becomes a 20 centimetre neck flap in the back. In combination with a UPF rating of 50+, it's clear this is by far the most protective of any of the hats we've reviewed. Ventilation panels and its extremely light weight should make it a winner among those who value functionality over style. Ultimately, that is the only area where the Adventure Hat will lose out as it does look quite unconventional. Perhaps if enough cancer-conscious people start wearing them, they won't look quite so unusual in the near future.

11. Cruiser

This hat has a unique brim design, with an even 7.5 centimetre brim around the front and the sides, which then expands out to 10 centimetres in the back, thereby offering greater protection to the nape of the neck. It's crushable and is designed to float, so this stands in competition to the synthetic options from Tilley. Just like them, it's also exceedingly lightweight and crushable, making it simple to stow

and transport. The integrated wicking liner also does a solid job of evaporating sweat away from your head, keeping you cooler in the process.

12. Solar

Fashioned after the traditional bucket hat, this is the only hat we trialled of its kind. Sunday Afternoons markets it as something you might wear in everyday scenarios, and that may be the case, but we found this hat was an instant favourite during trials for its blend of utility and style. It's extremely lightweight at just 62 grams and the crushable brim makes it extremely easy to throw into the bottom (or top) of your pack without having to worry about how it looks when it comes back out. It's a good example of a classic design rendered in modern day textiles.

13. Quest

This hat is most notable as a hat designed specifically for women, but other than that it is not particularly remarkable as far as the Sunday Afternoons hats are concerned. Colour options are skewed towards the feminine rather than the usual unisex options, while the soft, unstructured brim gives it something of an almost-fashionable appearance. Weighing just 95 grams it's also among the least heavy hats we've trialled and it's therefore very easy to wear all day. Perhaps the only thing to watch out for would be the fact that it does only come in one size, which means there may be some wearers who find it unsuitable as a result.



Jatbula Trail

Taking in some of the most iconic gorges and rock art on offer in the Northern Territory, *Andrew Davison* guides us through Nitmiluk National Park along the Jatbula Trail



Biddlecombe Cascades.
Photos: Andrew Davison

Nitmiluk National Park is widely known for its series of 13 magnificent gorges, sculpted from the sand stone plateau by the Katherine River. However, the park harbours many other hidden treasures, pools among groves of palms and paper barks, deep precipitous gorges and tumbling waterfalls. These riches can only be discovered for those undertaking the Jatbula Trail, which links the Nitmiluk visitors' information center to the pleasantly cool deep pools beneath Leliyn (Edith falls).

The route of the Jatbula trail has been travelled for a millennium; generations of Jawoyn people, the traditional owners of Nitmiluk National Park and adjoining areas have followed this path linking permanent water sources across their country from Nitmiluk to Leliyn. Now, a trail five-to-six days long has been developed in consultation with the traditional owners to allow walkers to have an easy wilderness experience and a glimpse into this unique and continuing culture of the Jawoyn people.

PERMITS AND INFORMATION

The Jatbula trail has a maximum capacity of 15 walkers departing per day, therefore, all walks must be booked in advance. Bookings commence on November 1st for the following year and the trail tends to book out quickly. Bookings are done online via the links below. There is a camping fee of \$3.30 per night per person payable when booking. Additionally, the ferry across the Katherine River to the trailhead is a further \$7 per person, which can be arranged on arrival at the park information centre.

The trail is a one-way trip and must be walked from Nitmiluk to Leliyn (Edith Falls). For many walkers this will require a shuttle between the

two locations. Gecko Canoeing and Trekking (Phone: (08) 8972 2224, Email: gecko@nttours.com) or Travel North (Phone: (08) 8971 9999, Email: transport@travelnorth.com.au) offers a shuttle service from Leliyn (Edith Falls) camp ground to Katherine and from Katherine to Nitmiluk information centre.

WHEN TO GO

The trail is open throughout the Dry Season of the Top End from June 1st – September 30th. However, opening dates can vary from year to year depending on the severity of the previous Wet Season. Although permanent water remains at each camp throughout the Dry season, by late August – September, the water is often stagnant at 17 Mile Falls and Edith River crossing. Additionally, by September the daytime temperatures on the plateau often reach into the low 40s, however, with adequate planning it is possible to have all the walking for each day completed before the heat of the day kicks in and then relax in a soothing water hole as the mercury rises. The best time to do the trail is early in the season, June 1st to early August, when the landscape is green, the rivers and falls are flowing strong and the waterholes are full. The likelihood of rain on the trail throughout the dry season is low; therefore it is possible to only require a mosquito net for sleeping.

WARNINGS

Early in the season, wildfire can be encountered along the trail. The fires are often small and a normal part of the northern Australian environment. Although these fires do not pose such a threatening risk as wild fires in southern Australia, care should be taken. If you are confronted with a fire, try to move toward wet areas or pre-burnt areas until the fire passes. Often the fronts are small and they can be avoided.

Pigs and water buffalo can be encountered along the trail, particularly early in the season and along the Edith River where bogs remain. Both these animals can pose a great risk to the walker, particularly the water buffalo. Advice given at the information centre is to stay well clear of the animals and climb a tree if necessary!

The trail is generally not open until the river levels are safe to cross, however, in the event of unseasonal rain, the rivers may rise rapidly and attempting to cross can be dangerous, particularly as most crossings are above waterfalls. It is best to wait until safe to cross


as the water does recede rapidly.

Situated along the trail at various locations and at each camp are Emergency Call Devices (ECD) for contacting a ranger in an emergency. NB: Any evacuation through the activation of an ECD is at the expense of the walker evacuated.

MAPS

Maps for the trail are available online in a colour, printable PDF and each section of the trail is covered in a convenient A4 page. For further information on the Jatbula trail visit the Parks and Wildlife Service NT website.





Once the plateau is reached, the trail flattens and enters different vegetation, most notably grasslands dotted with well-dispersed trees.



Sophie Lines walks through tall grass along Edith River



Leash O'Neil with young Sara Davison crossing Crystal Falls River

THE WALK

Day 1: Nitmiluk Information Centre to Biddlecombe Cascades, 8.3km

From the Nitmiluk information centre it is a short walk to the boat that ferries walkers across the Katherine River and on the eastern bank of 17 Mile Creek. After leaving the boat and climbing the steep bank, the trail sets off through woodlands of eucalyptus and tall grass, undulating along the slopes of a low escarpment and following the course of 17 Mile Creek that lies 100 metres to the west. Soon the creek veers away from the trail as the trail maintains its course onto a small (usually dry) water course that leads in a north easterly direction and eventually into a broad amphitheatre of cliffs. Early in the season the line of cliffs is broken by a narrow ribbon of water crashing among a jumble of rocks before falling into a large pool known as the Northern Rockhole, the first in a series of magnificent swimming holes along the trail. Northern Rockhole is almost half way to the evening's camp and is an excellent location to enjoy a lengthy swim and lunch.

On leaving the hole, the trail soon comes to a well-defined vehicle track. Turning right onto the service track, the trail begins to climb a leading spur to the plateau top. This short gentle climb is the largest climb and most strenuous section of the trail. Once the plateau is reached, the trail flattens and enters different vegetation, most notably grasslands dotted with well-dispersed trees. Shortly after cresting the top of the plateau, the trail passes a composting toilet and enters the camp site for the first evening, a large flat sandy area about

50 metres beyond this is Biddlecomb Cascades. Fed by a significant spring, the waters of Biddlecombe flow strong throughout the year and offer excellent swimming, particularly in the hole below the main falls.

Day 2: Biddlecombe Cascades - Crystal Falls, 11km

On leaving the campsite, the trail runs upstream along the banks for approximately 100 metres before crossing at a narrow and shallow point, however, expect to get your feet wet.

The trail then maintains its course in a northerly direction along the edge of the plateau through dissected stone country. After approximately 45 minutes of walking, the trail arrives at a small gully where, early in the season, water seeps from the ground to form a small pool of water (do not rely on this site for water as it is unreliable, however, it can provide a refreshing swim for those who are walking very early in the season). Soon after the seeping water a large rocky outcrop is noted. It is at this site the first of the ancient rock art is found among shelters and beneath towering palms on the overhanging walls.

The trail continues through stone country before crossing a moist gully that holds a stagnant pool of water fringed by pandanus until late in the season. However, there is evidence of pigs entering this area so the water is less than appealing and is not to be relied upon. On climbing from this shallow gully the trail passes another small, ancient art site in the shade of a small overhang on the right side of the trail.

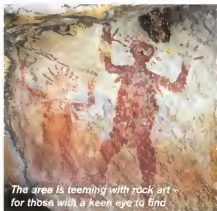
Soon after, the trail begins to descend into the valley of Crystal Brook Falls and the pleasant,

shaded campsites by the broad river. For an afternoon exploration, cross the river and follow the beginning of the trail for the following day, soon the falls will come into view.

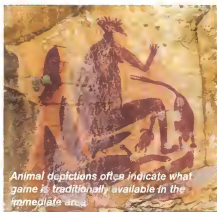
Day 3: Crystal Falls - 17 Mile Falls, 10km

It is a broad, precarious crossing to the northern banks of the river where the trail climbs to a stunning view of Crystal Falls. The trail then climbs through stone country before arriving at the hot sparsely treed, gravel plateau. The trail continues its northerly course, occasionally allowing for views from the escarpment edge across the broad 17 Mile Valley. After approximately two hours walking the trail arrives at a sign denoting the Amphitheatre, a cool pocket of monsoonal rain forest hidden in a hairpin shaped depression in the escarpment. Leaving packs at the sign and following the northern edge of the Amphitheatre will lead to a steel staircase to easily access the cool and moist microclimate of the monsoonal rainforest below and the site of a number of impressive ancient art sites. A spring at the base of the cliff feeds a stream of cool and fresh water. Crossing the stream and climbing to the base of the opposite escarpment leads to an impressive gallery, the best on the trail. Returning to the sign, the trail continues, occasionally offering views from the plateau edge and for a short period follows the course of a vehicle track inland before descending towards the edge of the plateau and great views of 17 Mile Falls, followed by a short distance to 17 Mile Creek. The trail crosses the creek 100 metres above the falls before crossing a boggy section of trail to arrive at the campsite.

The pool below the falls may look inviting



The area is teeming with rock art – for those with a keen eye to find



Animal depictions often indicate what game is traditionally available in the immediate area

with its palm-fringed banks, however, this pool is not monitored for crocodiles. As they can easily find their way to this pool below, the escarpment is not recommended for swimming. Fortunately the pools just below the camp site are safe and excellent for swimming.

Day 4: 17 Mile Falls - Sandy Camp Pool, 16.8km

This is the longest day on the trail. If you are

walking late in the season, it is recommended to carry enough water to get you to Sandy Camp Pool. (There is an official camp site at Edith River Crossing making for a shorter day. The camp is not overly inviting in comparison to that at Sandy Camp Pool and late in the season the water at this camp is not desirable as the river stops flowing above ground, leaving only stagnant pools of water).

Leaving 17 Mile Creek, the trail climbs shortly to the flat plateau, allowing easy walking for the morning. After approximately two and a half hours of walking, the trail crosses a broad shallow gully and enters a different environment. The now sandy soil holds grooves of pandanus, tall eucalypt and thicker undergrowth, this change allows for cooler walking conditions. The trail follows the base of low rock outcrops before coming to the Edith River and turning in a southerly direction following its course to Edith River Crossing.

The trail crosses the river at a rocky bar and continues on the western bank downstream, shortly arriving at Channel Pools, where the river is forced into a channel between the surrounding stone country. Leaving the stone country the trail continues through tall cane grass and occasionally enters cool pockets of monsoonal forest that fringe the river. The trail crosses the river again and eventually arrives at a rock bar that again crosses the river to Sandy Camp. Sandy Camp is located on a large sand bank beneath spreading paper barks by a stunning clear deep water hole, an idyllic location to lounge after cool dips throughout the afternoon. Before leaving, be sure to check the floodwater mark on the inside of the toilet door to get a perspective of the amount of water that flowed through the Edith River valley in 2011.



The camp at 17 Mile Falls



Beauty beyond compare
at Sweetwater Pool

Day 5: Sandy Camp Pool – Leliyn (Edith Falls), 15.6km

The trail is easily lost and found again as it weaves its way through the reeds on the western bank, but after a few hundred metres it climbs out of the reeds and continues along the bank, though the river is rarely in view. After approximately one and a half hours of walking, the landscape changes as the trail enters stone country. The river starts to flow again and takes a sharp turn toward the west

and the trail follows it, now traversing rock slabs, to soon arrive at the picturesque Sweet Water Pool. It is permitted to camp at Sweet Water Pool, however, since the 2011 floods that removed many of the larger trees, the camp site does not offer a great deal of shade. This is an ideal location, however, for lunch and an inviting swim before continuing west along the riverbank toward Leliyn (Edith Falls). From Sweetwater Pools the trail becomes wide and well defined as a large number of day

walkers make the short 4.5 km to the pool. After an hour of walking, the trail arrives at a junction where the trail links to the loop day walk from Leliyn (Edith Falls) campground. Taking the right trail is the most direct route to the campground. Following the left trail allows the walker to pass the spectacular upper falls and pools, allowing for a final swim before arriving at the campground and the end of the Jatbula Trail where there is a kiosk, showers and camping. [W](#)

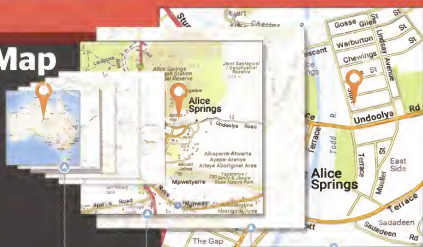
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GONE FOR SHORE: A SEA KAYAKING GUIDE TO NORTHERN QUEENSLAND – GUEST BOOK REVIEW BY LEXIE WEBSTER
by Tim Trehearn (Self published, \$24.95)

Author Tim Trehearn and his wife first developed their passion for sea kayaking in 1984 while working for Outward Bound in Scotland. When they returned to Australia, they became pioneers of the sport in North Queensland. The in-depth knowledge of the region Trehearn has developed since then is evident in this well-considered and logically presented guidebook, making a valuable purchase for anyone planning a kayaking trip up north. The first part of the book, which is broken into three sections, addresses matters specific to North Queensland, such as advice on how to identify the various jellyfish and treat their stings (think box jellyfish and inkandji), tips on tide and weather, and considerations on kayaking with crocodiles. The rest of the book details various routes around North Queensland, including beautiful colour photographs and detailed maps that make planning a kayaking trip much less daunting for anyone interested in paddling in the region.



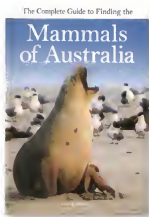
FIGHTING HARD: THE VICTORIAN ABORIGINES ADVANCEMENT LEAGUE
by Richard Broome (Aboriginal Studies Press, \$39.95)

One of the oldest Aboriginal bodies in the country, The Victorian Aborigines Advancement League has been acting as a welfare advocate and activist platform since it was founded in 1957. As such, it became the blueprint for similar organisations that were striving against the government's assimilation policies at the time. Since then, the League has offered assistance to Koori people including advocacy and council, and it continues to prove its capacity for effecting positive change while maintaining Aboriginal cultural values. Unfortunately, the majority of Victorians are likely unaware of the League, or may have only heard of it in passing. This book, *Fighting Hard* details the full history of this organisation, and highlights the ongoing fight for respect and recognition that Aboriginal people from across the country – and the world – are confronted by on a daily basis. Although a largely historical account, Broome's writing nevertheless evokes the charged atmosphere of the '60s and '70s, in which much of the major perturbations within the League took place.



ON TRACK: SEARCHING OUT THE BUNDIAN WAY
by John Blay (NewSouth Publishing, \$39.99)

Journeys often reveal a history of place, of people and the inexorable passing of time, but few are as well described as John Blay's hunt for the Bundian Way – an ancient trail that runs from high country of NSW to the coast. Not only has Blay spent years exploring the wilderness areas for signs of the original inhabitants of the land (you can read a brief retelling of a walk he completed in the Brogo wilderness on page 44), but he has also extensively researched his subject, seeking out all manner of literature and even taking the time to interview numerous people. Perhaps most importantly, Blay doesn't hesitate to broach uncomfortable topics, openly discussing the Aboriginal massacres that occurred during settlement, and the tough way of life that was pursued by the colonialists. Ultimately, the book is very much focused on the experience of walking in the wilderness areas available in southeast NSW. As this is a common destination for many avid bushwalkers, the book will no doubt provide additional insight and appeal for all who read it.



THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO FINDING THE MAMMALS OF AUSTRALIA
by David Andrew (CSIRO Publishing, \$49.95)

The term 'ecotourism' is becoming increasingly popular as a means of reconciling the friction that exists between conservation and tourism in a way that's positive for both. By encouraging visitors to learn about the flora and fauna of a place and to experience it in a safe manner that doesn't put either at risk means part of that 'tourist dollar' can be channelled back into research and management. For these reasons, CSIRO Publishing has released this guidebook to Australia's mammalian fauna, which seeks to inform potential visitors on how best to have a positive experience with these animals. It includes a complete, annotated taxonomic list, as well as travel information. 'Bat diversity in the Sydney area increases as you travel toward the city's western edge,' is an example of the many tidbits of information that can help anyone to gain first-hand experience with the creatures we share a country with. Use this book in conjunction with your next bushwalking or paddling adventure and you're bound to have an enriched experience.

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READER GEAR REVIEW

TATONKA YUKON 60L \$419

The Yukon rucksack from German brand Tatonka makes an ideal outdoor and travel combination pack due to its unique loading options. Like most others, it can be packed from the top, but unlike them it can also be zipped open from the front. This front zip is concealed and easily locked when necessary. The other major benefit that will please many long distance bushwalkers is the V2 harness adjustment system that Tatonka has included in this pack. Not only is it a comfortable, well padded and ventilated harness system, it allows for easy height adjustments to be made so that finding the perfect fit becomes that much easier. As a medium-build woman who has suffered from back injuries in the past, I found this pack simple to adjust and easy to carry – in fact, after a week of walking with it, my posture and lower back strength is better than it has been in years.

Anna Fowler



Sophie, a Year 11 student from the Northern Territory, describes her favourite place to visit

My favorite place to go is Urapunga Community. This is where I used to call home before I moved to Jilkminggan six years ago. My family and I always go back to Urapunga on holidays to visit the rest of my family. It takes around three hours to get from Jilkminggan back to Urapunga over a very bumpy and dusty road. Urapunga is a popular place for local people to go hunting, fishing, camping and swimming.

I like to visit Urapunga in the dry season because it is easier to get around in a small car. In the dry season the grass is brown and the weather is hot. In the wet season the grass is green and it's very humid. It is beautiful in the wet season because there are colorful birds like grass birds, parrots, eagles and cockatoos, and the bush is alive with new plants and singing insects.

When it's dry the creeks and billabongs get bone dry and the animals race to the main river for water. In the wet season the roads get soggy and muddy, making them slippery and easy to get bogged. The tourists come from different places to fish for barra at Roper Bar Crossing. Barra are a popular fish in the area for white people and Aboriginal people. It can be hard for people in Urapunga to go shopping during the wet season because of the floods. They get stuck in the community and the roads become cut off.

Every night in Urapunga, families from different houses sit outside together and tell jokes and old stories about each other when they were young. We spent most nights sitting around the flaming fire under the dark sky filled with lovely bright stars and a lonely moon.

If someone in Urapunga needs help, everyone from the community comes together to help each other. During the middle of the day and through the night it's tranquil and peaceful in Urapunga.

When I go fishing there with my family the time is always filled with smiles and laughs, my uncle is constantly telling funny jokes. My uncles love to take us fishing, bull catching and fixing cars. My second eldest uncle is called Richard and the

Sophie (left) enjoys family visits to Urapunga in the Northern Territory



other one is called Wayne, they come from a little community called New Castle near Elliott in the NT. They have been working in stock camps since they were in their teenaged prime. They didn't go to school a lot of the time when they were young, but they loved the bush. They are great horsemen and they love fixing nearly anything that breaks down.

Once, when I was 12 years of age, my uncles, mum, brothers, stepdad and my cousins from my uncle's family and I went hunting on my uncle's bull catcher. The day was hot. Every time we go hunting my uncle

always takes us to a swimming place to have a swim.

When the rainy season comes, nature and all of its creatures come alive. The breeze flows through the country, cooling the bush down.

We go through country that has dry grasses, trees that have black-brownish barks with orange-reddish-yellow leaves falling down on the ground and there is always air blowing across the country. Round the hills we run with my uncles' bull catcher searching for fat, tasty cows that we love to eat.

When we see the cattle in a bunch, my uncle would begin to chase them and we would have to keep up, chasing them over the black soil ground, round the creeks, dodging the termite mounds and between the trees. When we catch up with them, my uncle would jump in the catcher and we would all be in the back, screaming and laughing. Then my uncle would finish cornering the cattle, he would wedge a cow's leg between the mud guard and wheels – he caught it so the cow would not move or do anything. Then my uncle would just shoot it though the head, bleed it, start to skin it and cut the meat off the cow. Then he would do the same to the other side of the cow.

Now that we live in Jilkminggan Community my parents have more opportunities to get a job, to support my fourth-eldest brother and me. But now it's just me they are supporting. Before it was my parents' job to work as assistant teachers in Urapunga School when I was little, but it was hard for them to make money. So we came to Jilkminggan for more opportunity.



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